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IN THE BALANCE; OR, A SHADOWED LOVE.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH,

AUTHOR OF "A DESPERATE VENTURE," ETC., ETC.



SHE STOPPED TO HEAR WHAT HE HAD TO SAY.

In the Balance;

OR,

A SHADOWED LOVE.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH,

AUTHOR OF "OUTWITTED BY HERSELF," "IS LOVE A MOCKERY?" ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

"WELL, you are hard hit, old fellow. I never in my life before believed that you were made of such impressionable material. You are as plastic as a bit of clay."

"Nonsense—nonsense, Clayton; I'm in no mood for banter. Tell me who she is, and don't keep me in suspense any longer."

"A fairy—a bewitching little fairy, granted; and her name is— But I am not sure I have any right to tell you her name."

"Go on, man; unless you wish me to kill you on the spot."

"Well, it is a pretty name—a marvelously pretty name. It is Muriel Faber."

"Muriel!"—and there was a sadness in Philip Lazenby's voice as he repeated the name of a young beauty he had seen for the first time on that day, which extended itself temporarily to gay Joe Clayton, for he stopped for a moment in his banter, looking at his friend in some astonishment as he went on, "I had a sister called Muriel once. It is a name in our family that usually brings grief."

These two young men were school and college chums, and now, at the age of twenty-five, had both begun life for themselves in earnest.

Joe Clayton, who always looked on the practical side of every enterprise, intended to be a rich man, he said; and having gone onto Wall street as a stock broker, and being both shrewd and practical was already beginning to turn money around with advantage to himself.

Philip Lazenby was much more of a visionary than "practical Joe," and, at first starting, he had had a strong tendency toward an artistic life.

He had actually been known to have attempted the composition of a tragedy during his leisure hours at college, and he was insane enough to hope some day to have it acted.

But Joe would have none of this idiotic nonsense, as he called it, hermetically sealing his ears whenever Philip attempted to read him a word of it, and signifying it as his intention that his friend Philip should go in for business like a sensible fellow.

He carried his point, too. After a good deal of waste of breath in argument and counter-argument, Philip joined the large commercial house of Burlington, Frost, and Co., extensive importers from China to the United States.

He kicked violently against the traces both before and after he gave in and followed his friend's advice; but he did follow it, and that was the main thing.

Whether Messrs. Burlington, Frost, and Co. would have an efficient servant or not remained to be proved.

Philip Lazenby had been about six months in the employ of these aforesaid gentlemen when he first met, or rather saw, Muriel Faber.

It was on a Sunday afternoon, the 10th of December, a very wintry December, too, even for our climate. It was a hard frost, and the snow that had been falling thickly for at least twenty-four hours looked dazzlingly white in the sunshine as the two young men, skates in hand, started for the north pond near Rahway.

The pond was crowded. They found various acquaintances on the ice, and both being in the highest spirits, they enjoyed themselves thoroughly, especially as Sunday was the only day in the whole week when they could have any recreation by daylight.

A young fellow by the name of Danvers had been their companion all the afternoon.

He was a friend of Mr. Clayton. Philip Lazenby had never seen him before, but in the course of conversation discovered that he lived in Rahway not a quarter of a mile from the pond.

When it became too dark to skate, he suggested that they should all three adjourn to the large villa called the "Evergreen" and join his mother and sisters at their five o'clock tea, which it turned out, being Sunday, was quite a repast, that amphibious meal known as "high tea."

Philip, as a stranger, was introduced to and received by Mrs. Danvers with much cordiality.

She was a widow, who idolized her only son, and delighted to do honor to his friends.

Opposite to him, when they had all sat down at the table, was a young lady who had come into the room after the others, and to whom he had not been introduced.

She was not a Miss Danvers, of that he was very sure. The two he had already seen were undersized, stout, dark-complexioned girls, while this houri (for so he thought her) was, though rather *petite*, perfectly well-proportioned, with beautiful curling blonde hair and a fair complexion, on which the color came and went with every change of thought and feeling. Her features, though perhaps not regular enough for an artist's model, were yet full of expression, now archly piquant, now melting into tenderness that was almost sad.

In a word, she was a beauty, and Philip Lazenby's heart was really on fire for the first time. So much on fire that he could scarcely bear to hear Joe Clayton and the Danvers family generally talk familiarly in chaffing jocularly.

She ought to be put on a pedestal and worshiped, not addressed as if she were an ordinary mortal.

No wonder his friend Clayton told him he was hard hit, and threatened to withhold the young lady's name.

The rhapsody with which Philip Lazenby had talked of her after they bade Danvers good-night and were in the train on their way back to town was enough to make any individual think twice before he decided to give any information on the subject.

They were walking fast through the New York streets toward their respective homes before the name was actually uttered.

Clayton lived with his family on Twentieth street; Philip Lazenby, whose people resided in the country, in comfortable quarters not far from the Claytons.

After Philip had remarked that Muriel had been a luckless name to those of his race who had borne it, there was no more said on that or any other subject till they reached the corner of Twentieth street and Fourth avenue.

Here Clayton stopped and shook his friend's hand warmly.

"You'll get over this nonsense in a day or two, Phil, for I doubt if you'll ever see Miss Faber again. She does not live with the Danverses. She is only on a visit to them."

"Not see Miss Faber again!"

The very idea was maddening, and came to him like a sudden stab for which he was in no wise prepared.

"Where does she live? Tell me; I must know where she lives!"

"Oh, somewhere in town; out toward Harlem. Her father is a Colonel Faber. They are rather swells, I believe; at least, the Danverses always pay Ella, as they call her, great court, as if they considered her far superior to themselves."

"So she is!—so she is! And they call her Ella, you say?—not Muriel? I am glad—very glad!"

"What an idiot you are, Phil, to care what she is called! Do, pray, divest your head of all this nonsense. Come with me; the governor and the mother will be delighted to see you at dinner."

"Not to-night. No, thank you, Joe; I must decline your invitation to-night."

"Well, I must be off! It is just 7.30, and

my people are most punctual. Not that I am hungry after those muffins and things Mrs. Danvers made me eat. You, I suppose, feasted on love? Unhappy youth! I hope you'll have recovered by the morning. Ta, ta!"

Philip Lazenby vouchsafed an answer which was scarcely gracious, considering the intimacy that existed between these two men; and then, turning on his heel, he went straight to his rooms on Broadway.

These were very snug and comfortable. A bright fire was burning in the sitting-room. He threw himself into an arm-chair beside it, and for awhile remained absorbed in thought.

As he sat there, the flickering flame-light playing about his brow, he presented no unpleasant picture.

His features were regular—most people would have called them handsome—and his countenance, set off by a pair of large black eyes and a long beard, was decidedly a very genial one. Impetuosity was strongly marked there; but when was not impetuosity akin to nobleness and sincerity?

Whether it was the result of Mrs. Danvers's good cheer, or the love on which Joe Clayton hinted that he had feasted, it was very certain that Philip Lazenby did not seem at all inclined to go out in search of a dinner, a meal for which he would usually put himself to any inconvenience.

So much so that the portress, who had been an old servant in the family, and consequently thought it her duty to look after Master Philip, put her head into the room, and asked if he was ill, and whether she should get him anything.

"No, thank you, Bridget; only tired. Besides, I dined early to-day. I am going presently to have some supper."

The officious old woman's intrusion interrupted the current of his thought, whatever it was; and he got up, shook himself, put on his great-coat and sauntered out, slamming the door just as a neighboring clock struck nine.

Considering the chilliness of the atmosphere, he walked very slowly down toward Union Square and turned into his club, a modest one, in a by-street, which, however, had a good many pleasant fellows on its list of members.

In the vestibule, as he passed in, two men were talking rather excitedly.

They were both known to Philip, and he rather paused as he passed them to see if they would speak to him.

A hot argument in the hall at that time on Sunday night was somewhat unusual.

"He was always the most peppery fellow in the regiment!" one of them was saying just as Philip came up. "It is of no use minding what a fellow like that says. He forgets it himself five minutes afterward. Here's Lazenby; he'll tell you just the same as I do. You know what a free-spoken, rampageous sort of a man Faber is, don't you, Lazenby?"

"Faber—Faber?"

Had he heard aright, or was it that that name had been ringing in his ears the entire evening, and he could not free himself from it.

"I do not know any man of the name of Faber," he said, after a moment's pause, in order to recover himself.

"Nonsense, my good fellow! Not know Jack Faber! Why, he's here every day!"

"Then I suppose I am not here every day—at least not at the hour he is—for I do not know him."

"Oh, I forgot you were at business all day, and he seldom comes in the evening. He is worth knowing, though, in spite of his quick temper, which Black seems to think so very objectionable. He has the best table and the prettiest daughter in the city."

"I don't care about men's tables or their daughters, if they insult me with their tongue!" muttered a fierce, red-haired man called Black; while Philip Lazenby, more perplexed than ever, stood looking aghast at the first speaker, a cheery little fellow that every one called the Bijou, because he was so very fastidious about his appearance and the cut of his clothes, loading his not very large person, moreover,

with an amount of jewelry which was perhaps scarcely in accordance with perfect taste.

He had the *entree* to nearly every good house in New York, however, his agreeable manners and extreme good-nature outweighing all the prejudice his little absurdities might have raised against him.

"Where does this Faber live, and what has he been doing to Black?" asked Philip, when his little stare of wonderment was over.

"He lives in the upper part of the city. I'll introduce you if you like. They've got a ball on the 19th."

"Don't go, Lazenby. Faber isn't a gentleman. He called me an empty-headed coxcomb!"

Lazenby laughed—perhaps he agreed with Colonel Faber; most men at the Meanderers' did, on that subject at all events.

The smile on Philip's face provoked Mr. Black—who was quite as peppery as Colonel Faber—still more, and he vowed so loudly he would have his revenge, that the unusual coincidence of a row in the hall of the Meanderers' Club seemed imminent.

In fact, it required the concentrated joint efforts of both Philip Lazenby and the Bijou to soothe Mr. Black's overflowing wrath.

Lazenby was delighted to tender his share of assistance, for had not the meeting with this irascible little coxcomb brought about the very introduction that he wished for at that moment more than anything else in life?

Mr. Black somewhat sobered down; he left the club, and Philip followed the Bijou into the dining-room, which at that hour was nearly deserted.

The Bijou, like Philip, had been skating out of town, and had not dined; so they both sat down together, and before the repast they ordered was over, the Bijou had promised to take Philip to the Fabers' reception the following Tuesday afternoon, and introduce him to Mrs. Faber, when, he had no doubt, he would receive an invitation to their ball.

Philip did not tell the Bijou a word about his meeting with Miss Muriel at the Danverses' tea; but he wondered during the whole evening afterward whether the beauty who had usurped possession of his heart would have returned home by Tuesday afternoon.

CHAPTER II.

BOB.

SHE was running her hand up and down a magnificent Weber in the large drawing-room in their city home, striking an occasional chord.

Evidently she was indulging in a dream, and whenever now and again something very like a fact came forcibly to her mind, it asserted itself in a chord.

Muriel Faber had seen Philip Lazenby more than once since their first meeting at Rahway and perhaps it was of him that she was dreaming.

He had not declared his passion in words. To do so would have been premature and well-nigh impossible, since he had scarcely seen her for five minutes alone; but his large, dark, love-pleading eyes had so plainly told their tale, that she would have had but little womanly instinct had she not understood it.

After awhile her meditations take a more roseate hue, for she leaves off striking chords, and dashes into a brilliant dance melody.

It is speedily interrupted, however, by the entrance of her maid, who carries a lovely dress of silver tissue across her arm.

"I thought you would like to see it, Miss Ella. I have just finished it, and as I knew you were alone, I ventured to bring it in."

"Oh, Clarkson, it is too lovely! You are a good, clever Clarkson, to make me a dress like that. I hope people won't say I want to outshine every one at my own ball to-morrow night. It would be too horrid."

"You'd do that, whatever dress you wore," said Clarkson, looking at her young mistress with admiring fondness.

Clarkson was one of those appreciative servants who only care to bestow her talents on pretty women.

Muriel laughed at the compliment. She was used to compliments from Clarkson, and did not attach much value to them.

Muriel was as really beautiful in mind as she was in body, and she had not a spark of vanity in her composition. She valued the lovely dress, however, more especially as she knew her delight in it would please her maid, and Muriel's chief aim in life was to give pleasure to others.

"Even papa will be delighted with that frock; and you know how fastidious he is."

Clarkson frowned.

Yes, she did know how fastidious Colonel Faber was—no one better.

He was no favorite with Clarkson, and if she had been pressed to give an opinion of him, no doubt she would have indorsed Mr. Black's.

But whatever Colonel Faber's foibles were—and there is no doubt he was very testy and obstinate—he, to all appearance, dearly loved his daughter, and would have been prepared on an emergency to make any sacrifice to advance her welfare and position in life.

We use the terms welfare and position advisedly, for Colonel Faber would not consider her happiness.

He was one of those men who do not believe in the existence of mental suffering.

Muriel, too, was very fond of her father in a sort of a way. She did not respect him. No man is ever respected who gives way to the sudden and almost unprovoked outbursts of temper that Colonel Faber did.

But he was her father, and as such Muriel thought it her duty to uphold and love him as far as she could.

The being that Muriel did really love was her brother Bob—an individual whom no one ever saw, or even heard of. He and Colonel Faber did not agree—that is, the young man had never quarreled with his father on any particular subject; but his father disliked him, and sent him to sea when he was a lad of thirteen; since which time, though he was now five-and-twenty, he had never returned to his home to reside.

On the rare occasions when he was on shore he went to live at an uncle's in the country, who was a brother of Colonel Faber's first wife, who was Bob's mother, but not Muriel's.

These relations of Bob's were good, kindly, honest people—a sort of gentile armers; whereas the connections of the second Mrs. Faber were decidedly aristocratic and high-toned.

Both Colonel Faber's wives were dead when Muriel was nineteen, and Bob five-and-twenty; but the last one had always sneered at poor Bob for his want of polish and his rough, outspoken tongue. She it was who had set his father against him in the first instance, partly, perhaps, because she was jealous of any lingering fondness he might retain for his first wife, partly because she did not care for the boy's vulgar relations.

She regretted it all, however, before she died, poor proud woman, but then it was too late to alter matters.

Muriel's opportunities thus for seeing Bob had been very few and far between, rendered, however, the more precious by their rareness.

When Mrs. Faber died Muriel was about sixteen, and the night before her death she commended Bob to the girl's love.

"Make up to him," she said, "as much as possible in what I have failed, and win back to him his father's love."

Muriel scarcely wanted this recommendation, since her own heart yearned toward her brother; yet it strengthened her determination never to lose sight of Bob, and the letters that passed between them were very frequent; but they were never spoken of in her father's presence.

An occasional surreptitious meeting, too, was arranged between the brother and sister, chiefly through the instrumentality of the

Danvers family, who were Muriel's only confidants on the subject.

By these statements it may be inferred that Colonel Faber was somewhat of a Tartar—ay, was he, a very Tartar—without even an outward coating of veneer.

It has been said that the Bijou promised to introduce Philip Lazenby to Mrs. Faber and in truth a Mrs. Faber presided over the establishment; but she was not the colonel's wife, but the widow of one of his younger brothers, who, from being almost penniless, was glad to accept the somewhat dependent position he offered her as his housekeeper and chaperon to Muriel.

She was a little, faded, fragile woman, who shook in her shoes whenever she heard her brother-in-law's voice, and was even afraid of Muriel because the girl would do things sometimes at which she knew her father would be displeased; and yet she had not the strength of character to try and prevent her. Muriel never talked to her about Bob.

"Aunt Fanny is an amiable old thing," she was wont to say to the Danverses; "but she counts for nothing."

Without Aunt Fanny, however, Muriel could not have had balls or visits from young men; and Philip Lazenby would probably have never put his foot in the house; and a good deal—well, a good deal of both pleasure and pain would have been spared.

Philip Lazenby had called twice, once with the Bijou, once alone; but he had not yet been presented in due form to Colonel Faber.

He had made it his business to know him by sight at the Meanderers'; but Colonel Faber had no idea of Philip's very existence.

For some reason, probably an instinctive one, neither Aunt Fanny nor Muriel had mentioned the visits of this young man.

They neither of them ever told Colonel Faber more than they were obliged, a disagreeable outburst being frequently the result of mentioning the merest trifle.

There was some one in the house who knew about Philip Lazenby's visits, however, and that some one was Clarkson.

She had been sitting at her work by an upper window on the previous afternoon, trimming the silver dress.

Occasionally, though very intent on her occupation, she looked across the street to rest her eyes for a second or two on some other object.

Whenever she did so, they fell on Philip Lazenby, who was walking up and down, as though he were waiting for some one.

"He is a good-looking young man," said Clarkson to herself. "I wonder who he is after?"

Just as she was asking herself the question, the carriage drew up, and Aunt Fanny and Muriel came in from a drive.

Clarkson put down her work, and got up to go and attend to the ladies, casting, however, a lingering look across the street as the carriage drove slowly away.

"Here! If he isn't actually coming here! It is our Miss Ella that he's after," she murmured, as Philip crossed over, came up the steps, and, two seconds after, set the bell pealing.

He had got away from his business earlier than usual. In fact, since Philip's first meeting with Miss Faber, Messrs. Burlington and Frost's work had not been done as entirely to their satisfaction as before that event.

He had managed to find out something of the habits of the ladies of the Faber mansion, and he was wandering about to make sure that the carriage had not returned when Clarkson noticed him.

"Yes, the ladies were at home," so Mr. Lazenby made his call.

Two days before the ball! Odd that he should have called again. Even Ella thought so, though she made no remark about it to her aunt.

But afterward she pondered the matter over very frequently. He had not anything particular to say. Certainly he had asked her

for the first waltz on the night of the ball; but surely he had not come on purpose for that?

It was very queer, and his manner was so queer. Did she like him? She did not know. After the ball she would be better able to answer that question. She hoped she should not; and certainly she hoped he did not mean to care seriously about her, for she was very certain her father would not approve, and the difficulties of her life, which were not small already, would be increased tenfold. She wished the Bijou had never brought him to the house.

This was the sort of color Muriel's ruminations were taking, when Clarkson interrupted them with the silver dress. The praise Muriel was bestowing on this perfect garment was in its turn interrupted by a loud ring at the visitors' bell.

"Who can that be at this time of the morning?" cried Muriel, as Clarkson hurried away with the finery she had been exhibiting.

Before she ran up-stairs she managed to find time, however, to exclaim quickly, looking at Muriel the while, "Mr. Lazenby!"

It was only a stray shot the astute maid had fired, but it did not miss its mark.

Muriel grew instantly crimson to the very temples.

"Mr. Lazenby? What should he come here for?" she tried to ask indifferently, but the maid could not stop to answer.

She was gone; and till the butler showed up the visitor, Muriel was left querying what on earth Clarkson could possibly mean.

The mention of Philip's name, and the look that had accompanied it, annoyed Muriel not a little, and she determined to have a thorough explanation with Clarkson as soon as she was free.

Clarkson, however—Philip—everything connected with Philip, was put out of her head the next minute as the glad cry of "Bob!" burst from her lips, and her arms were thrown around her brother's neck. "When did you come, oh, you dear old darling Bob?"

"I only arrived in the bay yesterday, and I was so anxious to see your sweet little sisterly face, that I thought I'd risk it and come straight off at once. The governor is out, I hear."

"Yes; and the aunt, too; so come and sit down, and tell me all about everything, and let us be as happy as if there were no people in the world save ourselves."

So saying, she pulled him down on the sofa beside her, and then began to ask him endless questions about his ship, and his health, and his companions, what countries he had visited, how he liked them, what he saw there, etc., etc.

In fact, the whole conversation consisted of questions on Muriel's part and answers on Bob's—not very wonderful, considering it was eighteen months since Muriel had set eyes on this dearly-loved brother.

"You ask so much, you don't give a fellow a chance of finding out anything about you," he said, at last. "You look pretty, though. But, tell me, any dangles?—going to cheat me out of half my love by getting married, eh?"

"Not thinking of such a thing. Cheat you, indeed!"

But, somehow, Philip Lazenby's image flitted across Muriel's vision as she spoke. She did not let Bob see it, however, but went on speaking rather fast.

"We are going to have a ball to-morrow night. How I wish with all my heart you could be here! I wonder, if I went on my knees to him, whether papa would let you come. It is such a shame that you should be a stranger in your own father's house, just as if you'd forged, or swindled, or committed some horrid crime!"

"I have; I have committed the crime of having low-bred maternal relations. They are a good sort, though."

"Of course; they are better than some of the Fabers. There is a black sheep or two in our father's family, I believe."

And Muriel laughed.

"No, Ella; aristocracy can never stumble.

If it makes a trip, it always recovers its footing. It is only among the lower classes that men are compelled to be honest in order that they may be thought respectable."

And he spoke with a bitterness that he did not often exhibit to Muriel.

"You horrid democrat!" she cried. "Who would think the blood of all the Fabers was flowing in your veins? I'll tell you, Bob, what I'll do—"

But what she was going to do remained untold, for she suddenly looked round, and saw her father.

He had come into the room by a door at the further end of the back drawing-room, and on the velvet pile carpet his footfall had been unheard.

CHAPTER III.

A POLKA.

MURIEL FABER looked quite lovely in the silver tissue dress. Clarkson was right when she decided that it was the most suitable fabric her young mistress could wear.

And as she stood at the door with her aunt, receiving the earlier arrivals among the guests, there was a radiant look on her face far exceeding even its wonted brightness.

Of course Philip Lazenby was in good time. He had gone home from business a whole hour earlier than usual in order to bestow it on his toilette, though he was not usually a vain man.

He was to dine with the Bijou at the club, and they were to go to the ball together.

"Never," the Bijou said, "had he been so hustled and jostled off. If Lazenby were not cracked about sweet Ella, surely he would not be in such a hurry."

Lazenby did not tell him whether he was in love with Ella or not, but by dint of repeating, "Come on, old fellow," in various tones of voice, he managed to get him to the scene of festivity before the quarter past ten had struck.

She received him most graciously; but she said, "I cannot possibly dance the first waltz with you, Mr. Lazenby. As the hostess, it is much too early in the evening for me to begin dancing. I will so far keep my promise, however, that the first waltz I do dance shall be with you."

Philip was a little crestfallen; but, after all, it was only hope deferred; and he took up his position near the door to watch and admire the graceful way in which she received her friends.

The only fault he had to find was that she was too kind to them. Philip would have liked her to be kind to no one but himself.

In truth, as Joe Clayton had said, he was terribly hard hit.

There was a little man standing near Ella; in fact, he never left her side, and occasionally she looked round on him with a fond, glad look which seemed to make the blood curdle in Philip's veins.

Who was this man? Could he be an aspirant—perhaps a fiancé?

He asked two or three people standing by with whom he was acquainted, but none of them could tell him who this man was.

The room filled very quickly, and after the first two dances on the programme were over, Mrs. Faber and Muriel left their places by the door, the short, not very prepossessing-looking man still following Muriel like her shadow.

"Not a waltz, Bob; I can't dance a waltz. I have promised the first I dance to Mr. Lazenby."

"But this is a polka."

"A polka! All right; come along. Fancy papa letting you come to this ball, and my dancing with you, you dear old boy!"

And Muriel and Bob dashed into the vortex of dancers right joyously, talking and laughing as they twirled round and round, not heeding in the least a pain-stricken face and a pair of dark, longing eyes that watched their every turn.

This brother and sister were too happy to

have a thought at that moment for any other being on earth besides themselves.

It was the first time they had been together on their own ground, their meetings till that evening having been for the most part clandestine, and they both began to hope that Colonel Faber was relenting, and that, for the sake of his daughter's pleading, he intended to look more favorably on his son.

Bob did not tell Ella that it was solely on her account that he condescended to cross the threshold of his father's house, or that he never could really forgive him for the slight he had put on his mother's memory, or the sufferance on which he even now admitted him within his doors.

He had accepted his father's somewhat grudgingly-given invitation to that evening's entertainment solely on Ella's account, and he resolved to enjoy it with her to the utmost.

Next day he was to go into the country to spend a week or two with his mother's relations.

The music of the polka ceased, and Bob and Ella were still standing laughing together when a waltz struck up.

"Now it is Mr. Lazenby's turn," she said, looking round.

Philip had been there not two minutes ago, though she had not remarked him; but now he had disappeared.

As he heard the first strains of one of Strauss's most inspiring waltzes, he sauntered slowly down the stairs.

"She can dance with that fellow again. Why need I trouble myself about her?" he murmured to himself as he went in search of his hat and coat.

The crowd on the stairs was tolerably dense. He could not get down very quickly; and meeting several people he knew, he was compelled to stop and talk to them, so that by the time he reached the hall the waltzing was over, and the dancers, flocking down to the tea-room overtook him while he was uttering platitudes in a very *distract* manner to a certain old Mrs. Astor, who was voted by every one a deaf old bore.

The Bijou, with one of the Misses Danvers on his arm, whispered as he passed him:

"Nice mess you've got into! Miss Faber has been waiting for you all this waltz. You had better go and make your peace forthwith."

The end of a story Mrs. Astor was relating about how she had caught a fearful cold in her head, and been made quite deaf by not finding her carriage quickly at the theater two nights before, was lost on him.

"Miss Faber had been asking for him? Impossible! She was far too much taken up with that odious little square-set man."

He couldn't say this to the Bijou, however, for he had gone on; so he paused for a moment.

"No; he would not be made a fool of. He would go and get his hat."

He looked up the staircase as he turned to go to the end of the passage where the coats were.

Bob, with the other Miss Danvers, was coming down. They were both laughing merrily.

"Every one could be happy except him. He would change his mind again; he would not go away. He would go up-stairs and dance; but he would not take the slightest notice of Miss Faber. It was well for him that he had ascertained that she was a flirt, and not to be relied on."

He pounced on the first pretty-looking girl he saw and was acquainted with, invited her to dance, and went up-stairs with her on his arm.

Of course he met Miss Faber on the first landing.

She looked at him in some surprise; but he did not attempt to apologize.

He considered that she had thrown him over by dancing the first dance with another; and she was as angry as a modest girl could be at the treatment she considered she had received from him.

Before they were well acquainted they had quarreled and misunderstood each other. It did not promise well for the future; that is, if, in the future, they ever intended to speak again.

Muriel looked very thoughtful for a second or two; then she went up-stairs to her own room and sat down to recover herself, if possible, away from the dizzy throng.

Her enjoyment for that evening seemed thoroughly marred.

"For a stranger, too, a mere acquaintance whom I have known barely a week! I must be simply a fool to allow anything he either says or does to influence my spirits," she exclaimed at last, starting up. "I will go down at once and enjoy myself to the utmost. With my darling old Bob in the house fancy ever thinking about this Mr. Lazenby!"

And giving her hair a twitch as she passed the glass and the skirt of her dress the slightest pretense at rearrangement, she went down-stairs just as Bob was coming rushing headlong to know:

"Where she was, or if she was ill, or anything?"

They went into the ball-room together, passing Philip Lazenby without taking any notice of him.

How could Muriel know that his heart was thudding against his breast with mad jealousy and that he would gladly have strangled Bob on the spot!

Muriel was speedily surrounded by clamorous candidates, both of the eligible and ineligible order, for a dance, and to all appearance every shade of annoyance had disappeared from her fair brow.

And the evening swept quickly on till supper was over, and the rooms began somewhat to thin.

She was standing in the bay-window of a little room, which opened out of the drawing-room.

It was filled with flowers and lighted only with colored lamps. Muriel's silver dress shone like a gleam of light in the semi-darkness.

She had been dancing with young Danvers, and he was her companion now.

Mr. Lazenby came to the door with Miss Danvers. When he saw Muriel he became white as death, and would have turned to go away, but Miss Danvers held him captive.

"It is only Ella and Frank. They have no secrets, I am sure. Have you, Ella?"

There was a slight restraint in her manner when she recognized Mr. Lazenby, but she answered, genially:

"No, dearest—none! In fact, we are never going to have any secrets again now Bob's come back."

"Wasn't I glad to see him here to-night! How did you manage it?"

"Oh, papa happened to come in yesterday just as Bob, having got leave from his ship, had ventured into the house for half an hour. To my surprise he was quite amiable to him; said, in a pompous way he has sometimes: 'My son, I am glad to see you safe back in your own land,' and finally invited him to come to-night."

"Bravissimo!—and Bob accepted. So good of him to forget old grudges in such a friendly fashion!"

"Yes; but I really don't believe he cares about papa; he says he should not have come save to please his little sister."

During this conversation between the two girls, Lazenby and Frank Danvers had been talking together; that is, Frank Danvers had been doing the talking and Philip had been straining every nerve to hear as much as he could of this conversation about Bob.

"Her brother! Good Heaven! How he had maligned her! What must she think of him! He had, of course, lost every inch of ground he had ever made with her. What should he do? Oh, if the two Danvers would only go away and let him throw himself at her feet and implore her pardon!"

Frank did assist his wish without, perhaps,

knowing of its existence, for, turning to the two girls, he said:

"If you and Bee are going to gossip, Miss Faber, I must be off, as I am engaged for this dance."

"All right, go on. We are coming directly," his sister answered.

And they began to make a move, Miss Danvers following closely her brother out of the boudoir.

Now or never was Philip's chance.

"Miss Faber, one word, I entreat you! Can you ever forgive me? Can I ever forgive myself?"

She looked at him in disdainful silence, but stopped to hear what he had to say.

That was a point gained at all events.

But, having got thus far, Philip began to hesitate.

The explanation was not an easy one unless it was thorough, and how could he dare tell this girl on such a short acquaintance that he loved her fondly—devotedly, from the very first moment he ever saw her?

Half-measures, however, must not be dealt in, or his cause was lost.

"I thought—I believed—that is, I feared—but now I know—he is your brother."

It was a very incoherent statement, but Muriel understood it at once, and understanding it, burst out laughing.

Perhaps it was just a little bit of comfort to feel that this man was jealous.

Because she laughed, Philip concluded she was not angry, so recovered some of his self-possession.

"From the day I saw you at Rahway you have ever been present in my thoughts. Your beauty has— Oh, Miss Faber, if you only knew what I am suffering."

"I am sorry—very sorry!" answered Muriel, in her turn growing surprised; "but I do not know what you want me to do."

"Give me some little consolation—one word of hope, that in the future, perhaps, I may be allowed a nook in your heart."

"I have not known you many days, and yet—"

"Yet you do not exactly hate me? Oh, say that you do not, sweet, lovely, gentle Ella!"

She evidently was not displeased by this outburst, since her eye twinkled with a sort of pleased expression that did not indicate exactly love, nor altogether amusement.

"I don't hate you, certainly," she said; "but I have not known you long enough to be quite prepared to—to—care about you."

"But you will forgive me for my seeming discourtesy to-night? You will ascribe it to its true cause, love unbounded, uncontrollable love for you?"

"I will forgive you—yes. But at the same time don't be offended if I say that I think you just a little mad." And she really did laugh as she held out her hand to him. "Come, Mr. Lazenby, let us join the dancers, or observations will be made over our delay."

"One moment. Give me some promise—some hope to carry with me into the future. You will think of our conversation to-night, and give me a meeting, will you not?"

"Think of it?—oh, yes. And of course we shall meet here, and at the Danverses'. We are neither of us going to be locked up, are we?—unless you are going into a lunatic asylum, you madman. Let us take a turn."

She had not snubbed him; on the contrary, she considered she had given him very great encouragement.

But he, of course, was not satisfied.

Not even when she laid her hand on his arm and said, "This is a lovely waltz; let us take a turn, and dance away the recollection of that one which you preferred to pass down-stairs."

Philip Lazenby was a good dancer—few better; and as for Muriel, her sylph-like figure was graceful in its every movement.

Yes, he was quite happy for the moment, still all earthly bliss must have its limit.

When they stopped, it was by the door.

Colonel Faber was leaning against it, a frown puckering up his brow.

"Who is your partner, Ella?" he asked, loud enough for the young man to hear.

"Mr. Lazenby, papa. Let me introduce him?"

The two men bowed, but the older one did not look gracious.

"Lazenby!—Lazenby! Are you a son of Philip Lazenby, formerly of The Ridge Bank?"

"Yes; I am his second son."

And Philip looked delighted at the idea that Colonel Faber knew his father.

His next remark, however, damped the young man's ardor.

"Spendthrift your father was always. I knew him well as a youngster. How he has managed to keep out of bankruptcy as long as he did, I can't conceive."

"My father seldom confides his private arrangements to me," answered Philip with some stiffness.

"Oh, yes, by the by, your mother had money. I suppose it was tied up pretty tight, or it would have all gone too."

If he had not been Muriel's father, Philip felt he would have struck him.

Now he understood full well why Black and others called him a "crustaceous old curmudgeon."

He controlled himself, however, and only said, again speaking very coldly, "My mother is dead."

But Muriel came to the rescue.

"Papa, you are spoiling all our waltz; and you know I love dancing. You must go into old reminiscences with Mr. Lazenby some other time."

And she danced Philip off out of interference's way.

When, after a turn or two, they stopped, she said, "Papa is a little short in his manner, sometimes, but you must not mind him. You will like him when you know him better. Now, however, I think you had better leave me."

"Yes, yes; I understand. Perhaps it were wiser; but when shall I see you again?"

"Oh, soon—very soon. On Sunday, perhaps, at Rahway. I often go there on Sunday, and I am sure to go next Sunday with Bob. He was going down into the country to-morrow, but he has put it off."

Was this an assignation?

Muriel scarcely intended it for such; but Philip instantly rushed off across the room to chat excitedly with Frank Danvers, leaving him with almost as much precipitation to ask one of his sisters to dance.

If he thought these young people did not see through his maneuvers he was quite mistaken; for as soon as the brother and sister were together the former whispered:

"Awfully gone about Ella, isn't he? Do you think she reciprocates?"

"Not sure," was Bee Danvers's reply. "She isn't quite herself to-night. I rather like him, don't you, Frank?"

"I don't know. He looks crazy. I must ask Joe Clayton about him. It will never do to have him at Rahway when Ella is there, unless he is all on the square."

"No; of course not."

And these two young people looked as sedate over the love-making which, in their wisdom they thought they had discovered, as if the knowledge of it had added twenty years to their lives.

CHAPTER IV.

GOOD BY.

It is a fair spring day. The "Evergreens," where the Danverses live, is basking in the early sunshine, and the flowers which for months past have been hiding themselves away from the chill blasts of an unusually severe winter are showing their graceful heads once more above ground.

A good many events of interest have occurred since they went away and left drear desolation behind them; nor with their return have they invariably brought back gladness and joy,

at least not to the hearts of all those who dwell at the Evergreens.

Frank is as cheery and good-tempered as he was on the night of the Fabers' ball.

The winter does not seem to have tried him particularly, yet just now he appears a little anxious as he looks out of the window as though expecting some one to arrive.

Philip Lazenby and Joe Clayton! They are coming up the street now.

He will see them in a minute, as soon as they have passed that knoll of trees.

Very down-spirited they both look; something is amiss with one if not both of them.

"Cheer up, old fellow," Clayton is saying; "it is very brutal of old Faber to make you go abroad. But there! he is a brute—see how he behaves to his own son. Take my word for it, the time will soon pass—quicker than you think; and you'll return with pots of money, to wed the angel of your love's young dream."

"Three years at least I shall be absent; it is all very fine to talk of the time passing, but think of three years! I told you, Clayton, Muriel is an unlucky name."

"What stuff you do talk! Why you may think yourself wonderfully lucky to have got old Faber's consent at all. You know he had some grudge against your father, and said you came of a spendthrift lot."

Philip heaved a deep sigh.

This concession of Colonel Faber's that he should go abroad for three years and join a large mercantile house in Hong Kong, was even worse than no consent at all, as in the latter event he might have run away with the fair Ella the day she was twenty-one.

Colonel Faber, however, was wise in his generation; perhaps he anticipated some such measure, and thought he would wrest a promise from the young man to go to China for three years. At the end of which time, if they were both of the same mind, they should be married, he said.

Probably Colonel Faber thought that one or both of them would change in opinion by then, and that by this easy process he should rid himself of a marriage that was very distasteful to him.

Philip Lazenby had fallen into the trap and consented to act according to his wishes; and now, his honor being involved, he must keep his word.

It was, however, a very, very severe trial; how great a trial he scarcely knew till that bright sunshiny April afternoon when he was on his way to Rahway to bid farewell to his beloved Ella.

She had made a tryst with him there, feeling that she could bear the parting better if, when it was over, she would be surrounded by the Danverses' sympathetic faces, than if she had no one near her but her poor little washed-out aunt and her father, who she knew would glower at her with eyes which could not fail to mark his disapproval.

The Danverses' had almost persuaded the lovers to come and have their last meeting at their home; but now that the day was come, they all felt so uncomfortable that they regretted they had put themselves in the position to have their feelings so tortured. Both the girls were in floods of tears, and even Frank was by no means at his ease.

The calmest and most self-possessed person in the house was Muriel herself. Not that she did not feel the parting most acutely, but she was not a girl who ever gave way much to her feelings. The education she had received, always being compelled to hide her feelings from her father, was the probable cause of this.

She looked deathly white, and her hands were as cold as marble, when Frank, from his post of observation, announced that Philip Lazenby and Joe Clayton had turned the corner, and were even then crunching the gravel in the garden in front of the villa beneath their feet.

Frank Danvers was a Harvard undergraduate, and was at home for the Easter vacation. Pleasant boy though he was, most of the in-

mates of the villa would rather he had been absent that April day, since, by his observations, he rather succeeded in fanning the flame than in subduing it.

"Come out, Frank," said Bee, who was the object of Bob's especial affection—"come out. Mima will, of course, talk to Mr. Clayton; and if you and I are out of the way, those other two will have a chance."

By which it may be observed that the pairings were pretty general at the Evergreens, and that it was a nest in which every pretty little bird had her mate.

"All right; we'll go and spoon, if you like," said impudent Frank. "You can imagine I am Bob, and give my uninitiated heart a lesson in the art of love."

"You dreadfully rude boy, you know so much more about that sort of thing than I do!"

"Do I? Oh, Bee, that won't go down!"

And chaffing his sister in a fashion that was most thoroughly fraternal, the two made their escape out of the back door before Lazenby and Clayton could come in at the front one.

As Bee Danvers had observed to her brother Clayton speedily appropriated Mima, and the two lovers, who were to part so soon, were left alone; for Mrs. Danvers, who detested anything in the shape of a scene, purposely remained up-stairs in her own room.

"You will be true to me, Ella, whatever befalls—promise me that you will be true?"

"Do you know, Philip, you almost insult me by asking me such a question?"

And Muriel tried to look dignified.

"My darling Ella, don't be severe on me. I am so wretched at this parting, and I have a presentiment that your constancy will be somewhat severely taxed."

"Nothing—not even the most determined persecution—will make me waver in my faith to you. I hope I may be called on to endure persecution, in order that I may show you how firm I can be. There, sir! And now tell me whether I can depend on you as thoroughly?"

"Ella, death alone will prevent me from coming in three years to claim my wife."

"And now," said Muriel, "having exchanged vows of constancy in approved melodramatic fashion, let us see if we cannot be just a little bit rational."

True woman that she was, Muriel exhibited more courage than she really possessed in order to increase Philip's. When he had gone, it would be time enough for her to give way to tears, she decided.

To be rational, however, was the one thing Philip could not be that day.

He was as restless as a man in a fever.

He wandered about the room, talked at times most despondently; then suddenly changing, became radiantly sanguine; in fact, behaved altogether so like a madman, that poor Muriel thought that she had indeed accepted a somewhat onerous task when she had undertaken to love and obey this uncertain, rhapsodical gentleman.

She comforted herself, however, with the belief that when once they were married he would settle down and be more like other people.

Even a heartrending lovers' parting must at last come to an end.

Joe Clayton and Mima returned from a walk they had been taking in the town.

It was nearly five o'clock; the two men must return to town.

The train for San Francisco, whence Philip was to sail, was to leave at eight, and he still had several things to do.

At the last, Clayton, who intended to see him safely on board, had several things to do for him, for so overcome was he by parting from Ella, that he was totally incapable of thinking or caring about anything for himself.

The farewell was a bitter one, but it was somewhat hurried over by Joe Clayton, who did not see any use in a prolongation of misery.

A form of excitement which, so closely do

extremes meet, was almost an enjoyment to Philip, but which, the others suspected, was nearly killing Muriel.

And they were right.

No sooner was Philip Lazenby really gone—gone for three years—than all her assumed courage fled, and giving one piteous cry she fell down in a dead faint on the floor.

The Danverses did all that kindness and consideration could suggest to make poor Muriel's trial lighter, but to bring back to her her former high spirits was impossible.

Even to make her tolerably composed and cheerful during the first few days after Philip's departure was more than they could accomplish.

And when the period of her visit—just a week—was over, she went back to her home, looking such a feeble representation of her former self, that Clarkson cried out in angry tones of regret.

She did not know which to blame the most—Mr. Lazenby, for daring to interfere with her young lady's peace of mind; or Colonel Faber, for sending away the favorite lover.

As for the latter all-potent individual, he did not take any notice of the alteration in Muriel.

In the arrangement he had made for her future, perhaps he did not think it would be altogether expedient.

For a few weeks after Philip left, life went on much as it used to do before Philip Lazenby ever went there—that is, to all outward appearance; for Muriel strove very hard not to let her relations know how severely she was suffering from this separation, and she was always amiable and ready to enter into whatever plans were suggested for the day's occupation or amusement.

The only person who really knew anything of the state of Muriel's feelings were Clarkson.

Not that Muriel, by any means, made a confidant of her; but the maid knew her young mistress, that she could not fail to see the great change in her.

Meantime, where was Bob?

Away with his ship in the South, and able only by an occasional sympathetic letter to take any part in his sister's trouble.

It was the end of June.

Philip Lazenby had been gone two months; long enough for any girl to get over a love-affair, so Colonel Faber thought; and as he heard no bemoaning and saw no tears, perhaps he thought she had done so.

He had not reckoned on the depth of his daughter's affection.

"I have invited a few people to dinner for next Thursday," he announced at breakfast one morning. "See the cook on the matter yourself, if you please, Muriel, and see that we have a most *recherche* little dinner. It is quite time you began to attend to these things."

Muriel looked at her aunt, who had always been the housekeeper, and wondered what she would think of this order.

But the meek, crushed woman only said, gently:

"Quite right, my dear!—my brother-in-law is quite right!"

That there was some meaning, however, in this innovation, Muriel felt very certain; but, wonder as she would, she could not make out what it was, so she carried out her father's wishes, leaving time to unravel the rest.

It did so all too soon for Muriel's peace.

When the Thursday night of the dinner party arrived, she came down, looking pretty and sweet in a new pink frock of Clarkson's device, which, though becoming, made her look paler than she had done of late.

"You look as white as a sheet, child. We shall have to buy you a rouge-pot," Colonel Faber observed so roughly when he went into the drawing-room that the color came into her cheeks without the rouge-pot.

The guests began to arrive. Some of them were known to Muriel, though Colonel Faber had never condescended to tell who was coming.

Presently Mr. Tudor was announced. He was a man about eight-and-thirty, of decidedly unprepossessing appearance.

Muriel had never seen him before, and when he was introduced to her she at once decided in her own mind that she did not like him.

He was not a refined-looking man; and, in spite of his apparent wealth might easily have been mistaken for a shoeblack.

He took Muriel down to dinner, for another order of Colonel Faber's was that on that occasion she was to sit at the head of the table—a position which Mrs. Faber had always filled since she had been in her brother-in-law's house.

If Muriel's first impression of Mr. Tudor was a disagreeable one, conversation with him did not serve to improve it; in fact, she found it very difficult to make any conversation with him at all.

In intellect he was decidedly below par, and the only amusements in which he indulged being billiards and card-playing, fast horses and various kindred subjects which had very little interest for Muriel.

She chatted with him, however, as pleasantly as she could, helping him to a fresh subject whenever he stopped for want of something new to say.

Colonel Faber had argued wisely; in fact, he could not have been a truer prophet had he been told what was going to happen. Mr. Tudor was thoroughly taken by Muriel's winning ways.

"Charming!" he muttered to himself—"charming! She's just the wife for me. Helps a fellow so dooced cleverly when he gets hard up for a remark. Old fellow got some money, too, I should think—come in very conveniently." Then, turning to Muriel, he asked out aloud: "Have you any brothers, Miss Faber?"

"Yes; one."

His face fell, but Muriel did not notice. She was too pleased at having so congenial a subject presented to her as Bob, whose good qualities she loved to dilate on.

By the time she had worn it tolerably threadbare, she perceived that her aunt was blinking at her to make a move and conduct the ladies up-stairs.

"Miss Faber loves her brother with all her heart, but the colonel won't leave him a cent; hates him, for some reason," the Bijou, who sat next to Tudor, managed to whisper while the master of the house was moving to the top of the table.

The Bijou always liked to retail information. On this occasion it seemed almost as if he had been paid to do so in some way or other.

His communication had the effect of making the other much more gracious to his host than he certainly would have been if he had thought the good round sum of money, which every one knew Colonel Faber possessed, was to be left to that paragon of naval lieutenants, Brother Bob.

Once more in the drawing-room, Mr. Tudor soon found himself at Muriel's side; and she was very civil to him, simply for the reason that she was rather sorry for a man who seemed socially to flounder as he did.

Of course he totally misconstrued her meaning, and went off under the impression that Muriel was quite in love with him.

Not that she was the only young lady he had succeeded in fascinating—that is, according to his own calculation. Their number was legion; but in this instance he was rather attracted himself.

By which soliloquy it may be observed that, if poor in intellectual attributes, he was rich in vanity.

His first call in the morning after the dinner at the Fabers' was on the Bijou. He wished to subject that seemingly well-informed little dandy to a severe cross examination regarding the Faber family affairs.

Now, the Bijou knew all about Philip Lazenby. Had he not himself introduced him into Colonel Faber's house? Still, he never mentioned his name to Mr. Tudor, for the very

reason that he was a most objectionable little reptile, and wished to curry favor with Colonel Faber by furthering the views which he had communicated to him in regard to Muriel and Mr. Tudor.

Everything that the Bijou said had the effect of making Mr. Tudor more and more anxious to marry Miss Faber, and of taking home a mistress to Tudor Hall, a fine old place up the Hudson.

The result of the conversation, then, was that he wrote, assisted by Bijou, for his own dictation was not of the purest, a letter to Colonel Faber, asking permission to try and win his daughter's hand and affection.

A request which, before twenty-four hours were over, was acknowledged in the most gracious manner.

Colonel Faber, though thoroughly delighted, made it appear that he wanted time to decide, because he thought it looked better.

Having written his answer, he next went into Muriel's boudoir, where she was engaged in writing a long letter to Philip.

She thrust it out of sight when she saw her father, who, however, perceived what she was doing, but took no notice.

He put Mr. Tudor's note before her on the table.

"Of course you have told him that such a thing is quite impossible?"

"Indeed, I did not."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Mean? Well, you see, my child, now Lazenby has gone, there is always a chance that he will never come back. You surely do not mean to lose all your best days waiting while a careless n'er-do-well like Lazenby tries to make his fortune?"

"In three years, papa, you said we might marry."

And Muriel's lips grew as white as her handkerchief while she spoke.

"Lazenby will have no more money in three years than he has now, my dear Muriel. I should not be doing my duty to you as a parent if I allowed you to marry a man without a dollar."

"As long as Philip Lazenby lives, no power, however severely used, will induce me to marry, or give the slightest encouragement to any other man!"

CHAPTER V.

FLIGHT.

"Oh, Bob, Bob! if you were only here, surely no one, not even my father, would dare to treat me thus!"

And Muriel's whole heart went out in that one wild cry for Bob.

Philip was far away, already beginning to think of making money as a partner in the great house of Burlington, Frost and Co., at Hong Kong, into which he had managed to get by means of the relationship of his late mother with Mr. Frost; but even if he had been in America, he could scarcely have helped Muriel as Bob could have done in the emergency in which she was then placed.

After six months' persecution upon the subject of Mr. Tudor, during which Muriel had stood very firmly to her point, it seemed almost as though affairs were about to reach a crisis.

Tudor, like most weak people, was obstinate in the extreme; and having once taken it into his head that he wanted to marry Muriel Faber, he was not going to be put off it on account of what he was pleased to call a little "school-girl" opposition.

If he had only tormented her with his love-tokens and his appeals for affection, she might have suffered it; but he was perpetually talking to Colonel Faber on the subject, begging him to use his influence to urge her into this marriage.

And Colonel Faber's influence meant that she had received of late tolerably rough treatment at his hands.

In fact, it had come to this. She must either agree to marry Tudor, he had told her that morning, or leave his house and find some

other home; but not a dollar of his money should she have for her maintenance.

No wonder, then, that in such a strait as this she cried aloud for Bob. She was too proud to live on the charity of friends. To whom, then, could she turn but to her brother?

He was expected home shortly, but when would he arrive; and having arrived, would he come at once to see her?

She knew nothing.

For weeks, by her father's orders, she had been obliged to give up all communication with the Danvers family, who, Colonel Faber said, encouraged her in her absurd hankering after Philip; and they were still the only means of communication between Muriel and Bob.

For though Colonel Faber had invited him to the ball, so whimsical and uncertain did they know their father to be, that they judged it expedient not to change any of their old plans for corresponding.

Since this forced cessation of intercourse between Muriel and the Danverses, she had received no tidings of Bob.

He probably would be told by them that she was in trouble at home; but, away as he was in distant seas, what could he do to help her, even if he could have heard her wild cry of, "Oh, Bob! if you were only here!"

Colonel Faber heard it, however, if Bob did not. He had but just left his daughter after an unusually stormy interview, when she uttered it, and the hearing of it did not particularly improve her position in his opinion.

"If Muriel was so determined to resist him that she would go to Bob if she could only get the chance—well, she might do her worst. She would leave his roof or marry Mr. Tudor; of that he was quite resolved."

But Muriel was as determined as he was. She would be true to Philip. No power on earth would ever make her marry any one else!

Twenty-four hours to make up her mind; that was all her father had given her. It was thoroughly made up now, only where could she go?

It was useless to appeal to Aunt Fanny; she was so afraid of Colonel Faber, that she was a mere cipher. The Danverses, Clarkson—who always managed to know something about other people's affairs—had told her, were away on a pleasure trip.

Joe Clayton would help her, for the sake of his friend Philip. But how could she appeal to a man?

No; she had but one friend in the world, and that friend was Clarkson.

She believed she was faithful to her; at least, she always professed to be, so she would try her now.

Muriel had never been one of those girls who make a confidante of their maid, but she was in the direst extremity; if Clarkson could not help her, then her cause was indeed lost.

She did not ring for her, but ran impulsively up-stairs into the front room, where Clarkson sat at work by the window.

She looked so excited and wild, that the maid threw down her work, and looked at her aghast.

"Oh, Clarkson! you must, you will help me, will you not? Papa says if I do not consent within twenty-four hours to marry Mr. Tudor, he will turn me out of his house, to go wherever I please! And I cannot marry Mr. Tudor. You know, Clarkson, I have pledged my word to Mr. Lazenby."

"So it has come to this, has it? Always thought that Colonel Faber's brutality would drive you to something at last!"

"Hush, Clarkson! Please do not abuse papa. I must do what I think right in life for myself and Philip, but I would rather not hear anything against papa. I have no doubt he thinks he is acting for the best."

"Well, you are a good, generous-minded young lady!" cried Clarkson, looking at her young mistress in admiration; "and I should be worse than a heathen if I did not help you to the utmost."

"Then you will—you will—oh, you dear old Clarkson! I don't know what I should do without you. Well, tell me what is to be done?"

"In the first place, Miss Ella, do you know that Mr. Bob's ship is due on the 17th—that's next Wednesday?"

"Bob coming home! Thank God! thank God! But how do you know anything about it, Clarkson?"

"I thought matters were sure to come to a crisis before long, so last Sunday, when I took my afternoon, I made it my business to find out all I could. The Danverses are all away, except Mr. Frank. He'd just come back from the beach, on his way to college. He told me all as he could. I didn't tell you any of this before, because you didn't seem as if you wanted to know."

"Not want to know that Bob is coming home? Oh, Clarkson!"

Clarkson, however, was not so superior to her class but that she had that little foible of touchy jealousy with which they are all more or less imbued.

She had not been asked, so she would not speak. Now, however, that Muriel had consulted her, she would serve her to the death.

"Next Wednesday Mr. Bob comes, and this is Friday," she repeated, as though wishing to imprint thoroughly the condition of affairs on Muriel's mind.

"Well, what do you advise me to do? Papa will send me away long before Wednesday unless I consent to marry Mr. Tudor."

"Don't wait to be sent away, Miss Ella. I'll pack your things and mine, and we'll leave the house the first thing in the morning."

"Go away?" cried Muriel, in surprise.

"Yes, miss; my sister's husband's cousin has got a house down-town that he lets in apartments; we'll go and stop there till Mr. Bob arrives, and if he can't square matters up a bit with Colonel Faber—well, he ain't much good as a naval officer, I should say."

"What will papa say when he finds I have taken the law so completely into my own hands?"

"Why, that you are his own daughter, I should say. Look you, miss, don't do it if you don't like. It ain't no advantage to me to press you either way. If you prefer to stop here and be bullied, well, it's nothing to me."

"But the money, Clarkson? It will cost a lot of money, and I have only got ten dollars."

"Ten dollars till Wednesday! Lord, the half of it is abundance!"

"But then, you see, I may never get any more, if papa remains seriously angry."

"And Mr. Bob? Isn't Mr. Bob coming home?"

The idea of seeing Bob decided Muriel, who was half afraid of the bold scheme Clarkson had suggested.

"Very well, Clarkson, pack up the things, and we'll go to-morrow morning very early, unless papa tells me in the course of the day that he withdraws Mr. Tudor forever."

But Colonel Faber had no intention of withdrawing Mr. Tudor; on the contrary, that gentleman called in the afternoon, and though Muriel declined to see him, still the fact of his being there worried her not a little.

Meanwhile, Clarkson made all preparations. She packed up a small but useful amount of baggage, not forgetting all her young lady's jewels, and she took the precaution to carry most of the things quietly out of the house after it grew dark, leaving the one trunk which she was compelled to take to be called for by one of her own relations, and conveyed to her cousin's home while the late dinner was going on.

She and Miss Ella would then be able to walk out of the house in the morning without observation.

During the entire day Muriel took but little notice of Clarkson. She had so far consented to the plan, yet the idea of leaving her father's

house in this way filled her gentle, loving heart with dread.

In fact, that matters would be brought to such an extremity she could not altogether believe, the more so as the hours, excepting for the visit of Mr. Tudor, succeeded each other in monotonous routine, and no incident of any kind occurred.

Mr. Tudor had, on being refused admission to the house, gone straight to the club, where he felt sure of meeting Colonel Faber, and had laid his complaint before him couched in very severe terms.

He knew Miss Faber was at home, he said, for he saw her at the drawing-room window. Her declining to receive him was; then, a decided act of discourtesy.

From this further adverse move on Muriel's part since the conversation he had with her in the morning Colonel Faber of course concluded that she had no intention of being obedient to his wishes; and he went home furiously angry, determined to carry chastisement to the utmost limits of paternal authority.

He could scarcely contain his anger till the servants had left the room; but the door once closed on them, he broke forth in language which made poor little Mrs. Faber look more withered and crumpled than ever, but which only served to render Muriel more resolute and defiant than to one of her gentle nature would have seemed possible.

In fact, a scene ensued of which the colonel ought to have been thoroughly ashamed; and perhaps he would have been so had he not been beside himself with wrath.

So furious was he, that Mrs. Faber, fearing real mischief would accrue, was compelled at last, even against her will, to interfere, and beg the girl to leave the room for the sake of dear life.

Nothing loth to get away from a tempest so little in accordance with her feelings, Muriel took the earliest opportunity to escape to the door and to rush up stairs, forgetting, too, that she was leaving Mrs. Faber quite unprotected to receive the full vials of her father's anger.

She was not a brave woman; but few toadies are brave, and that Mrs. Faber was a toady there was little doubt. She managed, however, to weather the storm, and to defend herself and the absent Muriel with an amount of honest determination which even surprised herself.

Meanwhile, Muriel scarcely took breath till she found Clarkson, who was taking off her bonnet on her return from her cousin's, where she had deposited the trunk.

"No more hesitation," she cried. "I cannot stand these scenes, Clarkson. They will kill me."

"Kill you, my poor darling mistress! I should think they would. Whatever the colonel is thinking of I can't imagine. He must be a perfect barbarian!"

This time Muriel did not attempt to check her when she abused the colonel.

She only asked in a voice choked with sobs—for the result of the scene in the dining-room was that she had become quite hysterical—"Have you prepared anything for our departure?"

"Everything. Good gracious! I have not wasted a single minute this blessed day. Just come along to bed now, and keep yourself quiet a bit. It's no use worrying! When the colonel finds you have taken him at his word, and gone away, he'll only be too glad to give in, so that he may have you back again. Them violent people are always like that. It's a pity Mr. Lazenby ain't here to marry you straight off, and have done with it."

Muriel did not attempt to answer her; she was so exhausted by what she had gone through, that even the power of utterance failed her, and she allowed herself to be led to her room, undressed, and put to bed by Clarkson as docilely as if she had been a baby.

"There now, try and go to sleep, and forget your troubles for a bit, there's a dearie! Missie," said Clarkson, who was quite devoted

to her young mistress, "I'll call you when it is time to get up, and we'll be off and try and enjoy ourselves as well as we can till Mr. Bob comes. Only five days; think of that!"

But Muriel could not sleep. She tossed restlessly from side to side, sobbing.

Was this to be the last night in the little bed she had slept in since she was a child? If so, it was such a miserable one that she could not altogether bring her mind to regret it.

Once she thought she heard her father's voice, and she trembled as she lay there; her father, who till now, though a violent, disagreeable man to most people, had never refused her smallest wish.

She was almost thinking of ringing the bell for Clarkson to come and protect her, but the sounds died away, and once more she lay sobbing in peace.

She did not know that Clarkson, suspecting that Colonel Faber would come up "to let off a little more superfluous steam by bullying her young missis," as she called it, had locked the bedroom door outside and put the key in her pocket; and she was right. When he appeared, however, she gave him such a severe reprimand on his conduct that he went down stairs again rather ashamed of having given his daughter's maid the opportunity of blaming him for his behavior.

Early in the cold January morning, long before it was light, Clarkson unlocked the door and crept into Muriel's room.

"What! wide awake already? Well, get up, there's a dear heart, and don't be afraid. Think as it's all for Mr. Philip's sake as you are enduring this blessed martyrdom."

There was just a ray of happiness in the thought, and Muriel saw it as she got up with a sad smile on her face.

In less than an hour she was dressed in the warmest clothes Clarkson could devise, and having swallowed a cup of tea which the thoughtful servant had prepared, the two fugitives went softly down stairs before any one, even the under-housemaid, was astir.

They walked to the corner, and there they took the elevated road down-town; and very soon Muriel, feeling that she had done with her old home forever, was being whisked along at a brisk pace toward her destiny.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LETTER.

THE little villa at Rabiway where the Danverses live, though basking in the sunshine of a lovely April day, looks very solemn and still.

It is exactly a year since Muriel and Philip bade each other good-by in that very place; and if there was a mournful air about the place then, notwithstanding the smiling aspect of nature all around, it is ten times more mournful now.

Yet the shutters are not closed; the house has inmates.

Ay, but they walk about on tiptoe, and speak in whispers when they meet; nor are any of the pleasant if rather plain faces of the Danverses to be seen at the door or windows.

At the back gate two men are talking in low tones. One is Bob Faber; the other is Joe Clayton, the absent Philip's trusty friend.

That some dreadful catastrophe has occurred, their serious faces and low whispers would lead one to believe; and that it concerns Muriel, the occasional mention of her name reveals.

She has not married Mr. Tudor: she is much too loyal and determined for that; but she is up stairs in the Danvers villa in so precarious a state that her life is despaired of.

"She went to Clarkson's cousin's to await the arrival of her brother's ship; but days grew into weeks before it arrived, yet still they dwelt on there, no word reaching them from Colonel Faber."

Perhaps he did not know where they were, or knowing, thought that time and the want of the luxuries of life would bring his obstinate daughter to her senses.

If so, how mistaken he was!

Muriel had too much of his own nature in

her, though more nobly directed, to turn back one foot on the path on which she had set out. It was dreary work waiting for Bob, and her finances were getting very low.

Still, it never occurred to her for one moment to go back to her father's house and crave his pardon for offenses which she did not feel she had committed.

She must be dependent on Clarkson; and even if she took in plain needlework to eke out a modest subsistence she would not return.

At last, however, Bob's ship was in port, and life for Muriel was somewhat easier, though it perplexed good honest Bob not a little to know what to do with his sister.

She could not stop where she was—in fact, he himself would leave the city directly; nor dared he take her to the country relations, though he knew they would give her a hearty welcome; but he feared to raise his father's wrath still more inveterately against her.

Unless the Danverses would incur the responsibility and blame of harboring Muriel, he did not know what he was to do with her.

"Of course they would; as long as she liked to stay in their house, it was hers. Why, although they were at the Beach, had she not better go there at once with Clarkson?"

Nothing could be kinder than the letter Mrs. Danvers wrote in reply to Bob's; and, of course, the girls would be thoroughly delighted to have their dearest friend with them for a good long time.

To Rahway, then, Muriel went, attended by her faithful Clarkson, and right hearty was the welcome she received.

There was not one member of the Danvers family who did not side with her against Colonel Faber, and sympathize with her troubles to the fullest.

But cheering though the reception was that friends gave Muriel, she did not seem to rally.

For the first day or two after her arrival, she seemed depressed and out of sorts, her depression settling at last into such positive illness that Mrs. Danvers sent for the family physician, who at once ordered his patient to bed, and drew a very long face as he thought over her case, refusing however, to give her ailment any actual name till the morrow, when he would see her again.

His fiat then was that every one had better leave the house, save those in attendance on Muriel, as she had contracted what was likely to prove rather a bad form of small-pox.

Consternation and dismay prevailed in the camp of the Danverses when this was made known.

Each member of the family bravely said she would stay and nurse Muriel; but at last it was decided that Mrs. Danvers and the two girls were to take their departure, leaving Clarkson, who would resign her post as nurse to no one; while Bob, who had been telegraphed to, should remain in the house to give what necessary help he could.

Bob had been in the haunts of sickness too often to be afraid now; and as for Clarkson, she was impervious to every feeling save the knowledge that her young mistress was in danger.

For three weeks Muriel was too seriously ill to know aught of what was passing around her, or even to be aware of where she was; but to Bob it was a subject of much pain that his father had never once shown any sign of interest in the child he had once so ardently professed to love.

About a week after Muriel had been taken ill, Mrs. Faber had driven down from town, and stopping in a lane not far from the villa, had sent for Bob, and made many inquiries, professing at the same time to be terribly afraid lest her brother-in-law should know she had been there.

She never came again, so Bob imagined that Colonel Faber, having found it out, had judged it inexpedient that she should repeat the visit.

Joe Clayton was the most constant visitor, and daily were the colloquies he held with Bob

at the back gate—talks to which Bob looked forward with more pleasure than he even knew himself, since Joe was the only person to whom he could unburden his heavily-charged mind.

At last, Muriel was declared out of danger.

A little careful nursing for a while, and time and youth would do the rest.

Why, then, do both the young men look so grave as they stand together by the gate, since that very morning what has just been said had been the doctor's verdict?

To live? Yes. And to Bob, who loves his sister dearly, the news is joy; but to her, will life bring happiness? Are there not instances in which perchance death were the greater boon?

They were both thoroughly aware of Philip Lazenby's impressionable temperament, and the effect that beauty had upon his senses.

Would Muriel be as beautiful after as before this illness? was the question they put each other, and both dreaded to answer.

If she was not—and neither of them thought that she would be—might she not perhaps lose Philip's love; and, losing it, where would be Muriel's hope of happiness in life?

Neither of them dared put this surmise into spoken words; yet it was strong in both their minds the day they stood together at the back gate after Doctor Jenkins had said that Muriel was to live.

Both of them, unknown to the other, wrote letters by that evening post to Philip Lazenby, telling him that his sweet young lover was out of danger, but neither even hinted at the possibility of a change in her appearance.

Three weeks more, and Muriel was convalescent—so convalescent that she could walk a little in the garden with the assistance of Bob's arm, when he was not drawing her about in an invalid chair, which was his favorite occupation, in turn with Joe Clayton when the latter came to pay his daily visit.

All danger of contagion was over, the doctor said, and next week, since Colonel Faber had shown no sign, Muriel was to go and pay a visit to Bob's uncle in the country, just by way of having a little change till the house should be fumigated and the Danverses return to the town, from which they had been banished for so long.

Muriel's face was red and scarred. She would never again be the beautiful Muriel Faber, said every one who saw her; but she herself took no heed of the fact, and never alluded to it either to her brother or Clarkson.

Either she thought the marks of her late illness would wear out, or she had too little vanity to think the matter worth consideration.

The evening before she was to set out for Evans Mills the postman brought her a letter.

"From papa! You never told me, Bob, whether he sent to inquire after me while I was ill; but of course he did."

"Not much of that, Ella; but let us hear what he says now," answered Bob, a little ambiguously.

As soon as she opened the envelope, a check for one hundred dollars fell out of it.

"The governor is coming to!" exclaimed Bob, as he picked it up.

He changed his mind, however, when Muriel read the letter, which she did aloud.

It was to the effect that, considering the circumstances under which she had left his house, he could not openly inquire after her condition, yet he had watched the progress of her illness with interest, and as he did not wish his daughter to be at any one's charge, he inclosed a check to pay expenses.

At this period of the letter Bob burst out laughing. He could afford to laugh now Muriel was nearly well.

She read on:—

"But as he understood from those about her that she was disfigured for life, he hoped she would regard her illness as a just punishment for her treatment of his wishes, and return forthwith to her duty."

The letter fell from her hand as she read this sentence, and she became so pale Bob thought she was going to faint.

He picked it up hastily, and would have torn it to pieces, but, recovering herself with an effort, she snatched it from him.

"Let me finish it, Bob; let me see the whole truth."

"Of course," it went on, "but few men would be disposed to marry a girl who was no longer over pretty; but Mr. Tudor was one of those who believed in beauty of character rather than in beauty of form, and was as ready to make her his wife as he had been before her illness. It only remained for her to come back at once to her home, give her consent to this union, and let all disagreeable discussions cease."

"And Philip! What will Philip think of me?" she cried, when she had read the letter to the end.

"Philip is an upright, honorable man, and loves you. Ella, do you doubt him?"

"No, Bob, no; but I wonder if he will be very much shocked when he sees me. I did not know I was so dreadfully disfigured!"

"You forget my father's habit of exaggeration, especially when it suits his purpose."

"Then you think I will soon look like the old Ella you and Philip used to love?"

"I hope so, my darling sister; every day that passes you will improve."

"And by the time Philip comes back I shall be all right?"

"Yes, dear; unless the account of your illness brings him back at once."

Muriel shook her head.

"He can't come till the end of the time he promised papa he would wait."

"If Philip were never coming back you would never marry this Tudor?"

"No, certainly not. But what makes you talk of Philip not coming back? Do you know anything about him?"

"Nothing whatever. I asked more from curiosity than anything else. We stick to the programme. I suppose you do not return to your home?"

"Most emphatically not."

An answer to this effect was written to Colonel Faber, and the subject dismissed from their minds; but, from that evening, Muriel was changed.

Her spirits of late had been more like her old self, and each day, as she grew stronger, her merry laugh was heard ringing more and more joyful through the now cheerful villa.

From the time she received her father's letter she was perpetually looking at herself in the glass, and then turning away with a mournful shake of the head.

In the country life, among Bob's relations, with whom she might have enjoyed herself so much, she took no apparent interest, but whenever she could get away from her companions she would sit for hours alone, apparently doing nothing but thinking.

"I will release him from his word. He shall be free. If I am so hideous as my father says, and which the glass corroborates, why should I bind Philip to my lot for life?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE JUNIOR PARTNER.

PHILIP LAZENBY is sitting alone in his private room in the range of buildings belonging to the great firm of Burlington, Frost and Co., at Hong Kong.

The mail has just come in, and a pile of unopened letters is lying before him. He has run his eye over the addresses, and selected one in a well-known handwriting, that of Joe Clayton.

Its perusal evidently gives him subject for much thought, for he pushes the others away as though their contents were wholly uninteresting, while he reads and re-reads Joe Clayton's missive.

"Colonel Faber has not kept his part of the agreement; why should I keep mine? I shall go home at once. So he thought to banish me for two years to this infernal place, in the hope that he should thus get rid of me altogether? By Jove! but I'll be even with him."

"Hullo! what's this—a postscript!"

"Muriel very ill; her life has been despaired of, but she's turned the corner now. Clarkson and Bob nursing her night and day."

"He does not say what is the matter with her. Of course it's worry. Poor little darling Ella, with a heart as true as steel, how comes it that you are the daughter of this man? Of all the dishonorable, cowardly acts, to send me out here, and as soon as my back is turned to set to work and try to make my little girl marry some one else! But never mind; he has freed me from my promise to wait two years. I'll just square up affairs here a little bit, and see if I can't catch the steamer on the fifteenth.

"Messrs. Burlington and Frost will not be delighted to see me in New York again, but I must make my story good with them somehow, and now I'm junior partner, they can't turn me out, that's one comfort. Nesbit, the chief clerk, knows more about the business than I do; he'll manage well enough for a few months; but whether he does or not, I don't care; I'm going home. I won't have Ella bullied to death by that horrid old father of hers."

This was the sort of current in which Philip Lazenby's thoughts flowed as he sat there, with his letters before him, in the sweltering noontide.

When he had read Joe Clayton's letter once more, and thoroughly decided that he would start as soon as possible, he began to open the other letters very carefully. They for the most part related to business matters.

Really, Nesbit must attend to them; he was in no mood for buying and selling that morning! Ella's image came between him and every row of figures that presented itself—sweet, graceful, beautiful Ella!

Her illness did not seem to make so much impression on him as the fact that Colonel Faber had turned traitor.

Of course, she was ill. How could she be well when she was so tormented? But the sight of him would soon set matters to rights. He would telegraph when he got to San Francisco, and prepare her to receive him.

Still he went on opening letters.

"A woman's writing—Bee Danvers! Awfully good of her to write! 'They had all left the house; no one there but Bob and Clarkson. A most dreadful time, the fear of contagion always making illness more terrible. However, they must be thankful that the poor patient was really getting better.' What the very deuce did it mean? Had she a fever, or what? Clayton did not give her illness a name; yet Bee wrote of contagion. Typhoid fever, he supposed, from being bullied into a low state."

And so engrossed was he at this period of his reading by the account of Muriel's illness, that he did not even attempt to open any more letters; but ringing a hand-bell near, sent the messenger who answered it for Nesbit.

The old clerk, who had not left Hong Kong for fourteen years, and looked very like a dried-up bit of parchment, saw at once that there was something wrong with Mr. Lazenby.

He had become rather accustomed to Philip's sudden flights of fancy; but he saw there was something more the matter with him to-day than usual.

"I have had bad news from America, Nesbit. The young lady to whom I am engaged is very seriously ill. I want you to take over the direction of all the affairs of the house. I must start for home at once."

"Going home, are you?" answered the clerk, looking at him with a twinkle in his little sharp eyes. "It won't do much good, I suspect. She'll be dead or well by the time you get there."

Philip knew that Nesbit was of a cynical turn, and that he had an especial contempt for women, always averring that women invariably set business matters wrong, so he did not attempt to answer him directly, but merely asked, rather sharply, "Do you not feel equal to undertaking the sole management of the business arrangements?"

Nesbit smiled.

"Ay; I can look after the firm's interest in China," he said.

As well without as with Mr. Philip Lazenby, he might have added, had he not been a prudent man; for Nesbit had no opinion of Philip as a man of business.

"Well, never mind, then. Take all these confounded letters, and make the best you can of them," cried the junior partner, shoveling the whole mass of letters, opened and unopened, together, and pushing them toward his clerk.

Nesbit sat down in a corner of his office, read each letter carefully, made notes from it, docketed it—in fact, subjected it to a regular business inspection.

Having finished all the opened letters, he next directed his attention to those which Philip Lazenby had not looked at.

"Private!" he muttered, as he tore open the envelope of one of them.

He read it nevertheless, and determined to destroy it without showing it to Philip.

It was from the Bijou—a would-be friendly but utterly false missive—condoling with him on the illness of his lady-love. He did not spare him by giving the disease no name; on the contrary, wondered whether the ravages it would make on her beauty would lessen his adoration for her, and make him only too pleased to let her follow her father's wishes, and marry Mr. Tudor.

"That's a bad man," decided honest Nesbit, as he finished the perusal of the Bijou's epistle; "and I'm sorry for that poor lad, though he is no more fit to be a partner in the house of Burlington and Frost than my shoe. Can't think how he ever got there unless he paid a big sum of money; and he says his father's poor. Dare say there was a woman in it; there mostly is."

During this soliloquy Nesbit tore up the Bijou's letter, and thus saved Philip, for the moment at all events, a bitter pang. Perhaps if he had seen it he would not have gone home so promptly, but have given himself time to consider matters.

As it was, he knew nothing, save that Muriel was ill, and that Colonel Faber had been false to his engagements, so he started by the steamer on the fifteenth.

Naturally, he chose the straight route, and followed his first intention of telegraphing from San Francisco to Joe Clayton. That telegram Muriel received, forwarded by Joe, just as she was penning the very letter which was to set Philip free.

"Home—coming home at once—will be here in this very room, looking at me in a few days!" And she started up, and stood surveying her features in the looking-glass for some seconds. "If Philip only loved my beauty, all his love is gone! Why is he coming home? Oh, that I might remain under the delusion that he cares for me just a little longer—that I should live to regret the time that brings my Philip back to me!"

And she threw herself on a couch close to her and began sobbing as she had not sobbed since the day Philip left her. And because he was coming home.

When the sobs had well-nigh spent themselves, she lay very still for some time, her head buried in the soft cushion.

Suddenly the door opened, and some one coming in quickly made her look up.

It was Philip!

She gave a wild cry of fear, and once more buried her face among the cushions.

Philip's arm was round her in a moment.

"My darling!—my own darling Ella!" he said. "I am come back all the way from China on purpose to fetch you. We will be married at once and Colonel Faber must do his worst!"

Still Muriel lay weeping in his arms.

"Will you not look at me? Give me one ray of your beauty—one glad smile?"

But she did not attempt to turn round.

"Why, Ella, what is this? Are you not glad that I have come back?"

And Philip lifted the head off the cushion, since of her own free will Muriel did not attempt to look at him.

One glance, and he knew all the truth. She saw the expression of horror that swept suddenly over his face, and understood only too fully the bitter pang this sudden revelation had brought to him.

She hid her face once more, this time on his shoulder, and for some seconds there was a painful silence—no word was spoken between them.

Philip was mastering a strong emotion; till he had mastered it he did not dare trust himself to speak, even though he could feel her heart beat as she sat agonized and trembling in doubt as to what he would do.

At last, concealing his disappointment as well as he could, the better feeling of his nature predominated, and, smoothing her hair gently with his hand, he said, in very soft, low tones: "My poor, dear Ella, be calm, I entreat. It grieves me sorely to see you so distressed."

All the passion seemed to have died out of his voice, and given place to a sort of brotherly affection.

Was it his words or the manner in which he uttered them that made her look up at him suddenly with a searching look in the bright eyes which, in spite of illness, had lost none of their luster.

"I will be brave—very brave!" she said, striving to be calm. "I have been preparing myself for this meeting, but I scarcely thought it would come so soon. See, there on the table is a letter. I was writing to you. Please read it, Philip."

He took it up mechanically at her bidding, and walking to the window with the closely-written lines—for the letter was not a short one—he set himself to reading it attentively.

Perhaps he wished to gain time, collect his scattered senses before he felt he could speak to Muriel in the old love-notes of a year ago.

Behind the sofa on which Muriel was sitting there were some heavy curtains, and on the other side of them a small ante-room.

By the time Philip had finished reading the letter, she had disappeared through these curtains so quietly that he had not heard her go; and by a door in the ante-room had gained the rest of the house and her own room.

Time for reflection was thus given him. That the result would be honorable and noble, all those interested in Philip Lazenby must hope, yet that he sought to profit by the pause was perhaps not wholly to his credit.

When he found Muriel was gone he gave a little sigh of relief, and began to walk up and down the room as though fighting out the question with himself at every issue.

The solution did not apparently come readily, and he would have given the world for some one to consult. But Bob had left that morning—besides, how could he talk to her brother on such a subject?—and Joe Clayton was in New York. He had met Philip at the railway station on his arrival, and had told him where Muriel was.

There was only just time to gallop through the city to another station, and catch the next train for the place where Muriel was.

Impetuous Philip had but one idea—to see his love again; and now he almost regretted the speed with which he had come.

"Should he go down the stairs, put on his hat, and sneak silently away back to the Hong Kong counting-house?" his evil genius whispered. Then a better spirit spoke.

"Is Muriel less sweet, less amiable, less true, because a cruel hand has damaged her beauty?"

"No; but can you endure the daily sight of this marred and unlovely face?" replied the evil.

"It will be a severe trial—but your honor!" responded the better angel.

"Ay, his honor; and what is a man without his honor? A mere worthless sham, from which the sooner the earth is cleared the better."

The word honor brought Philip to his senses. He sat down and snatched up the pen with which Muriel had written this letter to him. He wrote on a scrap of paper:

"DEAREST ELLA:—

"Come back to me. Your pledged word once given to me you cannot retract, and I am, till death, your devoted,"

"PHILIP."

He rung the bell, and desired a servant who answered it to take the note at once to Miss Faber, and then again he paced the room, impatient this time for her return.

When after a few minutes she came back with his note in her hands he received her with extended arms.

"Philip, I cannot accept this sacrifice from you!" she cried.

But Philip, having made up his mind, had thoroughly mastered his repugnance at all events for the time, and he told her in the glowing words of old that there would be no sacrifice unless he was called upon to part with her, and that having come all the way from China, at the risk of incurring Messrs. Burlington and Frost's heavy displeasure, he did not intend to return there without a wife.

What could Muriel do but believe him, especially as she had not been a witness to the recent struggle?

So she agreed to brave her father's anger, and marry him as soon as Bob could be communicated with and arrangements could be made, and then she took him into another room and introduced him to Bob's uncle and aunt, good homely people, who received him with a hearty welcome, who rejoiced over the improvement in Muriel, for never had she looked as well since her illness as she did to-night.

Yes; she laughed and talked, and seemed bright and joyous, but Philip could not help a half-sigh of regret as he thought of what Muriel was in that dear dead past which could never come again.

CHAPTER VIII.

MAN AND WIFE.

"I TOLD you that Muriel is an unlucky name."

Joe Clayton shrugged his shoulders, and by the expression of his face it was obvious that some discussion the two friends were having was decidedly distasteful to him.

They were sitting together in Lazenby's rooms, where his faithful friend had been only too delighted to welcome him back again on his return from China.

"Unless you mean to make her happy, it is a pity that you didn't break off the engagement and proclaim yourself a puppy at once!" Joe says, giving the andirons such a vigorous kick that he sets them jingling.

"Make her happy? Of course I intend to make her happy! What do you mean by taking that sort of tone with me?"

"Well, you see, Philip, you are always going on about the disfigurement and the change in her, and all that sort of thing; and as a friend to you both I can't help observing that if you let her see your feelings on the subject it will make her perfectly miserable, and you had better at once give up all idea of the marriage."

"What nonsense! I am sure I think I act my part to perfection, but naturally I can't help feeling a little disappointed."

"Act your part! Then you acknowledge that you are acting a part when you still pretend to care for her? Oh, Phil, Phil, I could scarcely have believed that things had come to so terrible a pass! Would it not have been better at once to have told her the truth when she herself offered to let you free?"

"You seem to forget, Joe, that there is such a thing as honor in the question?"

"No—pardon me—I do not; but this same honor, according to you, demands that as long as you both live you must go on acting a lie, and professing to love this woman, never by a sign or a breath letting her know that she is other than the dear, sweet, angelic Muriel (which in truth she is) she once was."

"Good gracious, Joe! since when have you taken to view life so seriously? When I left for China you were the most flippant of all the 'don't cares.'"

"In my most flippant days I never could have stood by quietly and see a woman wronged."

"Now, look here; we'll have no more of this, if you please. There is no woman being wronged that I am aware of. I have come home all the way from China to marry Miss Muriel Faber, and I intend to marry her, and make the best of it. I dare say our married life will be very much like other people's married life, if only kind friends will let us alone."

Joe Clayton bowed his head, and did not attempt to answer. If Philip was disappointed in the change in Muriel, his disappointment would scarcely be keener than Joe Clayton's at finding what he considered so little straightforwardness in the character of the man he had regarded for years as his most intimate friend.

If Muriel was altered in outward appearance, there was little doubt that the alteration in Philip's feelings more than equaled it.

To think that the radiant love-dream in which he had reveled, and compelled all his friends, more or less, to participate in, should be so thoroughly dispelled—the rose-tinted glasses through which he had always looked on Muriel's beauty be exchanged for cold, gray ones, which made her look deformed and hideous in his sight!

He could do nothing, then, but watch matters as they drifted, and trust by an occasional well-timed word of advice, to be able to keep Philip true to the honor about which he made so much ado.

In less than a week after the conversation of the two men, the marriage was to take place—quietly, of course, since Colonel Faber's consent was not even to be asked.

In fact, he had never been informed that Philip had returned.

If he had found it out, it must have been from the Bijou, or through some such distorted channel.

Bob's old relations, who had nothing to gain or lose by pleasing or displeasing Colonel Faber, were much pleased that the marriage should take place from their house.

They probably did not altogether regret being enabled to pay off some of the scores they had against the imperious colonel for the many slights and annoyances he had heaped on them and their beloved nephew, Bob.

Besides, they had taken an especial fancy to Muriel while she had been staying with them; and how could they guess that the desperate love for her, which had once raged so furiously in Philip's heart, had died suddenly into a mere flicker, when he saw how illness had changed her?

Bob was to give the bride away, and start two days afterward for the city, to join his ship. He, too, was perfectly happy in the belief that Philip was devoted to Muriel, and that once married she would be at peace.

On the morning the marriage was to take place quite privately in the village church, with no witnesses save Bob and his old aunt and uncle, a dispatch came from Joe Clayton, saying that he had ascertained that Colonel Faber was quite *au courant* of all that was going on, and that he intended to put in an appearance in the church, and forbid the ceremony.

Every one was in a state of bustle and agitation except the bridegroom elect. Perhaps he almost hoped that Colonel Faber would arrive.

At all events, he professed to treat the whole matter as nonsense; said Colonel Faber could do nothing, that he would knock him down if he attempted to interfere, and much more to the same effect.

The clergyman was sent to, however, and it was arranged the ceremony was to take place at ten o'clock, which was an hour earlier than was originally fixed; and when Muriel, on

Bob's arm, walked up the aisle of the church at ten o'clock, she looked far more dead than alive.

Since her illness she could not bear fright and worry with as much fortitude as she had done before.

In the porch Clarkson seated herself, resolved to give the enemy battle if he should arrive, and thus delay as long as possible any intrusion on the wedding-party.

But Colonel Faber did not appear. The ceremony proceeded calmly and undisturbed.

Eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock, one o'clock, and no signs of Colonel Faber.

Joe Clayton must have been misinformed.

Muriel has changed her white garb for a dark plum-colored traveling dress, and she and Philip are about to start together on their wedding journey.

The carriage is at the door which is to convey them to the station, when a telegraph boy is seen coming up the drive.

"For Miss Faber."

Muriel, Miss Faber no longer, snatches it from his hand, and tears it open.

"Lowville station. Accident on the railroad. Colonel Faber seriously hurt. Come at once."

She gives one wild shriek, which startles all those who are standing near her; and then she totters against the door-post, as though she were going to faint.

But Muriel is one of those women who are generally equal to an emergency.

By a violent effort she recovers herself.

"I must go—go to him at once! Bob, you will accompany me?"

For a moment she forgets everything about Philip and his new rights.

The father, who had loved her, and attended to her every whim all through her childhood, was dying, perhaps!

All her own old love for him returned in full force.

Bob and Philip looked at each other aghast.

They feared what effect this shock might have on Muriel's health, shaken as it was by her recent illness. There was nothing for it, however, but to go; resistance would only make her worse.

So instead of the projected wedding trip, Muriel, accompanied by her husband and her brother, with the faithful Clarkson in attendance, started for Lowville.

Philip, it was decided, should make no appearance before Colonel Faber, but wait in the background till Muriel had seen him.

It was a dreary journey of at least two hours. Muriel scarcely spoke, only smiled faintly when Philip or Bob showed her some little affectionate attention.

Arrived at Lowville they were informed that Colonel Faber was at the Bingham House, and to the Bingham they accordingly drove.

"Was he alive?" was the first question they asked.

"Yes, he was alive, but in serious danger."

Muriel insisted on going to him at once; and before any one could prevent her, she had accompanied one of the servants of the hotel into a darkened ground-floor room, in which Colonel Faber was lying.

His head was bound up; but there were no wounds on his face which, however, looked ghastly white, as though he were already dead.

Muriel threw herself upon her knees beside his bed, and took his hand; but he neither moved nor gave any sign of recognition.

"He does not know me," she cried, in a piercing voice which reached Bob, who was standing in the hall, and at once brought him to her side.

"What was the injury from which Colonel Faber was suffering?"

"Fractured skull!" some one had muttered, while the two men were standing outside; but from whom they had received the information neither of them could tell.

Colonel Faber was not dead, but life was ebbing fast away—a fact that impressed both

Clarkson and Bob as they stood beside the weeping Muriel watching him.

"Can nothing be done to save him?" she asked, after a while, as she noticed that they all stood silent and inactive.

Bob shook his head, and there were tears in his eyes. This man had been hard and cold and cruel to him; still he was his father, and here was something very awful in the suddenness of this catastrophe.

"He will not speak to me again; he will not tell me he forgives me for my disobedience! Oh, Bob, Bob!—what shall I do? What shall I do?" sobbed poor Muriel.

Bob raised her from her kneeling posture.

"My darling sister, come with me into another room; this scene is trying you frightfully. If I see a chance of one ray of consciousness, I will come for you at once."

And without more ado he beckoned to Philip, who was standing by the open door and put his wife in his arms; and Muriel was laid half-fainting, and only half-conscious herself, on a sofa in an adjoining room.

She rallied, however, after a little while, and they could not keep her wholly away from her father.

She would occasionally go and look at him as he lay there; but the weary hours of the long day passed on, and no sign of any change appeared.

"He will not live till the morning," the doctor in attendance told Bob.

And he was right.

In the gray, small hours his spirit passed away so quietly that the passage from life to death seemed scarcely perceptible.

They were all standing around him when he died; even Philip Lazenby was there, wondering, as he stood with his arm around Ella, whether the dying man would have been so passive if he knew that they were standing there together man and wife.

It was all over, and for the last time Muriel was led out of that sad room and put into bed by faithful Clarkson before she returned to assist Bob in tendering the last offices to him who was gone.

It was arranged that Muriel and Philip should go immediately to her old home, and wait there.

Bob should have the body conveyed to the city, and the will should be opened.

It was a cheerless coming home, and poor Muriel felt it keenly; but every one was good to her.

Mrs. Faber, now she was mistress of her own actions, overwhelmed her with kindness, and Philip was quite the devoted Philip of old days.

Still it was very difficult for Muriel to realize the fact that the father, who had been so good to her all her young life, had left her forever—left her, too, in wrath. Useless for those around her to tell her he had canceled all his former goodness by his late harsh behavior.

Muriel seemed totally to have forgotten that he had been harsh.

Nor when the will was read would she even then utter a word against her father, save:

"I have deserved it—richly deserved it!"

Unless she married Mr. Tudor she was only to receive a hundred a year, to keep her from starving; everything else was to go to Bob. If she married Mr. Tudor, then she and her brother were to reverse positions.

Sorrowful as the events of the case were, Bob could not help smiling when he heard the will. It was so characteristic of his father, he thought.

Muriel went up to him, and throwing her arms round him, she said:

"I am very glad, Bob, dear—very glad that you have the money. You are his son, and it is yours by right."

CHAPTER IX.

'TWIXT HUSBAND AND WIFE.

A YEAR has passed away since Colonel Faber's death.

Philip Lazenby has not taken his young wife abroad. The great house of Burlington, Frost and Company did not think they could place sufficient reliance on a man who would leave his business to be managed as best it could, and return to America at a moment's notice because he thought his own particular affairs required his immediate attention.

If it had not been for certain money arrangements which had been made in his behalf, and which constituted him a sort of junior partner, though on a very small scale, they would probably have cashiered him altogether; as it was, they judged it expedient that he should remain in New York more or less under the eye of the partners, who would thus be able to direct his somewhat erratic movements.

Arrangements had been so made that he was to receive a much larger share of the profits when in China than he would do at home.

Of money then, under existing circumstances, he had a very modest share, so he took a house in Brooklyn for which he paid the moderate rental of five hundred a year, and Bob having volunteered to furnish it, he and Muriel took up their abode. And there she is sitting now, more than a year after her father's death.

She still wears a clinging black robe, and the bright smile has never come back to her face nor the joy-notes to her voice.

She is doing some white work, but every now and then it falls into her lap, and her hands, scarcely less white than her work, lie inactively folded over it, while an occasional tear drops unbidden among the folds.

Presently Clarkson comes in—faithful Clarkson!

She never makes pretty ball-dresses now; but she is true to her young mistress, and vows she will never leave her; she and a girl of eighteen are the only domestics in Muriel's house.

Clarkson is carrying a tiny white bundle in her arms, which she puts into Muriel's lap among the work, and asks her to mind it for half an hour while she sees to Mr. Lazenby's dinner.

It is Muriel's six weeks' old baby.

"My darling—my darling! what have I left on earth but you?" she murmurs as, Clarkson having taken her departure, she presses the infant to her heart and kisses it affectionately till the baby begins to whimper, as though rebelling against such demonstrative love.

Then she walked about for a little while soothing her while she still chatted to herself.

"No; I was wrong to say I have nothing else. There is Bob—good, kind Bob!—who would do everything for me if I would only let him. But he must not know." And she sat down again and contemplated her baby, while the tears this time fell rapidly.

The sound of carriage-wheels stopping at the door, made her, however, start up and wipe the tears from her eyes.

She had scarcely succeeded in removing all traces of them when the door was thrown open by Clarkson, and Mrs. Faber was ushered in.

If she remarked the tear-stains on Muriel's face, she said nothing about them; but, throwing her arms around the girl's neck, she kissed her affectionately.

Ever since Colonel Faber's death, his brother's widow had shown Muriel much more devotion than she had ever dared display in his lifetime.

"I have come, dear, to ask you to go with me for a drive," she said, the first greetings being over. "Of course I have not a nice carriage to offer you, as we had when we went out together in the old days, but in my poor little hired coupe we shall, at all events, get over some ground, and you will get a change and a little fresh air."

Muriel's first idea was to refuse, but she did not exactly wish to be ungracious to Aunt Fanny; added to which, Clarkson had remained in the room with the baby, after taking it from its mother, and she knew by a

sort of instinct that the faithful servant would insist on her accepting this proffered drive.

So she made a sort of virtue of necessity, and acceded without making any ado about the matter.

"Poor Ella!—poor, poor Ella!" ejaculated Aunt Fanny, as the door closed on her when she went up-stairs for her bonnet and outdoor attire.

Clarkson did not answer her in words, but she heaved a deep sigh, and hid her face in the baby's laces as she bent over it.

"When is Mr. Bob expected back?" was Aunt Fanny's question, somewhat abruptly put, as though she were a little angry at receiving no response to her first remark.

"In about a fortnight," was the answer.

"I shall be very glad when he comes," put in the aunt. "Perhaps he will be able to right matters a little."

"Mr. Bob won't do no good," asserted Clarkson authoritatively. "Nobody is no good as ever I saw try to come betwixt husband and wife."

"But surely Mr. Bob will put it before Mr. Lazenby that he is not doing his duty as a married man to go about in the way he does, and leave Ella to pine alone?"

Clarkson shook her head.

"If Mr. Bob's wise, he won't interfere. There's some things as is best not to see. Mr. Lazenby's shortcomings is one of them. He ought never to have married Miss Muriel, since he can't reconcile himself to her disfigurement. Mr. Bob can't bring back her beauty, so he had best leave the whole matter alone."

"Her beauty! Good gracious! You don't mean that it is because she is disfigured he has ceased to care for her? I thought Mrs. Wesley—"

"Hush! For mercy's sake, don't mention that woman's name in this house! Unhappy as my young mistress is at her husband's neglect, I do not think she has the slightest idea that any one has come between them."

Mrs. Faber looked aghast at the vehemence with which Clarkson made this statement; but the almost immediate entrance of Muriel prevented her from asking for a further explanation, as she would have liked to do.

Another five minutes, and the ladies were whirling along the road toward the Park in the hired conveyance, which was so unlike Colonel Faber's well-appointed carriage that they neither of them could forego a comparison as they sat, side by side, looking out of their respective windows in a silence which showed such great intimacy to be positively unsociable.

After awhile, however, they laid their reflections on one side, and began to talk, very carefully at first, as though they were both afraid of entering on subjects which either wished to avoid; then, gradually, the ice seemed to give way, and, finally, a thaw set in so rapidly that by the time they reached Prospect Park Muriel and Aunt Fanny were chatting away about a hundred little nothings with all the volubility of old days.

It was as though for a time Muriel had totally forgotten the fact that she was an orphan, a wife and a mother.

All on a sudden, however, she stopped in the middle of a gay sentence, and seizing Mrs. Faber by the wrist, she held her with so tight a grip that the poor little woman would have cried aloud with pain if she had not been so startled by the action and its accompaniment—a half-stifled scream—that she had no power left save to look out of the carriage window in the same direction toward which Muriel's riveted gaze was turned.

Philip Lazenby and Mrs. Wesley in a victoria!

It was a lovely spring-like afternoon in May; the sun was in the eyes of the pair in the victoria; besides, they were sitting and laughing together as though all-engrossed in each other's society.

Philip did not see his wife, and Mrs. Wesley would not have known her if she had seen her;

but Muriel would never forget her face again.

"She is beautiful—very, very beautiful!" she murmured, as, the victoria having passed, she relaxed her clutch of Aunt Fanny's wrist, and lying back in the corner of the carriage, closed her eyes, as though longing to shut out the recollection of that vision which had suddenly swept by her.

But, close them as she might, it would be ever, ever there; her husband, her Philip, side by side with that fair, laughing woman, who seemed utterly careless of the torture her appropriation of Philip might bring to another heart.

Alas, was she careless, and, to a great extent, blamelessly so, since she knew nothing of Philip's marriage.

Mrs. Wesley was a thoughtless, admiration-loving young widow, round whom the golden youth loved to flock; the first favorite, at this moment, being Philip Lazenby.

She had been left very well off by the late George Wesley, who had been an extensive ship-owner and builder, and she did not intend again to put her head into the matrimonial noose—so she told her intimates; hence she never troubled herself to inquire into the antecedents or family surroundings of the men with whom, for the time being, she amused herself by flirting.

Philip Lazenby's card had his club engraved on it by way of address; and Mrs. Wesley had not the slightest idea that he had a young wife and little daughter in a modest house in the upper part of the city.

When she should discover it, if ever she did, perhaps even gay Julia Wesley's opinion of Philip Lazenby might change.

Meantime, he reconciles the homage he is laying at the widow's shrine to his conscience with the explanation that, to a man of his artistic temperament, beauty is as essential as his daily bread, and that he is in no wise injuring Muriel by this devotion he is lavishing on another.

If he could have seen her face as she passed him in Aunt Fanny's hired carriage he might, perhaps, have changed his opinion.

But when, their several drives being over, they met at dinner in the humble home, Muriel had tutored herself into her usual state of quiescent endurance, and by no sign did she show that she had learnt anything that day which could, in the future, have any influence over her life.

Not even when the repast had been got rapidly over by Philip, and he pushed his chair back from the table, saying he had an important business engagement which would necessitate his going out at once, did Muriel lose her placidity, though the image of the siren with the yellow hair crossed her mental vision, and she had no belief, as she had once had, in Philip's business engagements.

It was just eight o'clock when he left her; having only bestowed half an hour on the dinner so carefully prepared by Clarkson.

The play to which he was to escort Mrs. Wesley began at a quarter to nine, and he had to get back into the city to put on evening clothes at the club—a practice which he frequently followed, in order to lead his wife, if possible, into believing firmly in his statements as to business appointments.

But Muriel, who had only suspected him up till to-day, and grieved over his seeming coldness and neglect of herself, had received full evidence, and would be blind no longer. The hoping almost against hope, as she had done of late, was past; henceforth, whatever Philip did, she would always imagine there was a golden-haired, laughing widow actuating him.

But Muriel was a wise woman; she determined that whatever befell, she would keep an invulnerable silence, and appear to know nothing, unless circumstances brought facts so palpably before her eyes that she could not help herself.

So the days passed on.

Philip was civil to her when they met, which was but seldom, and that was all; there were no affectionate caresses, no *petits soins*.

Still Muriel endured patiently; and no one, unless it was Clarkson, who knew her so well, could guess any portion of the torture she was enduring.

At last came a telegram from Bob.

His ship had arrived.

As soon as he could get leave, which would be in about two days, he would be with her.

Would she send for Bee Danvers, so that he might have both his dear ones together, and not be compelled to tear himself from either of them?

It was his intention, Muriel knew, when he returned from this voyage, to give up the navy, and settle down with his beloved Bee on the comfortable income which had been left him by his father.

All this would have been a delight and joy to Muriel but for her own secret misery, which she was more anxious to hide from Bob than from any one; and, fearful lest the Danverses might find it out, and tell him, she had not been to Rahway for weeks, pleading delicacy of health as her excuse—a plea which they were the more ready to accept, since, when any of the family went to Brooklyn, Muriel always looked so ill and weary, that they were all firmly under the impression that she was gradually fading out of existence.

That Philip was not more anxious about her, perhaps, surprised them, but no one guessed the truth; and Joe Clayton, who knew something of Philip's sentiments, guarded the knowledge carefully, not even telling his wife—for Joe had been married about three months before Bob's expected return.

Clayton, however, engrossed by his business, was totally ignorant of the existence of a Mrs. Wesley, or he would, in all probability, have risked a quarrel with Philip, and have undertaken the handling of the matter somewhat roughly; for honest Joe Clayton was scarcely a man to stand quietly by and witness such an utter wrong as Philip, in his weakness and his thoughtlessness, was perpetrating.

This, then, was the state of affairs when Bob dashed unannounced into his sister's house full twelve hours before the telegram had led her to expect him.

Bee, of course, had not arrived, but she had been sent for—would be there to luncheon.

It was only ten in the morning when Bob put in an appearance.

Philip had left the house about five minutes previously for the office.

The home arrangements all looked natural and comfortable, Bob thought. The wee mite in the cradle was a bit of perfection, he supposed; only his beloved sister's appearance did not altogether please him.

She seemed delicate and depressed; yet Muriel was in better form that morning than she had been for weeks. Her spirits had risen at the sight of Bob, and there was bright color on her cheeks.

"Two o'clock, you say, Bee will be here," Bob said at last, the first greetings and questions and answers being over. "Then after you have given me some breakfast, suppose we go out? I have one or two commissions to do, both for myself and a brother officer. You can help me in them, so, if you are agreeable, we'll charter a hack and be off."

Muriel was always ready to do what Bob wished, and without even asking where they were going, she got into the hack that very shortly afterward came up to the door.

Shop after shop he drove to, ordering a variety of things, both for himself and for presents, with a recklessness most men display when they return home from a long foreign absence.

"Now for Captain Carton's commission," he said, producing a tiny packet from his coat-pocket. "He has asked me to take this souvenir myself, and make the acquaintance of his sister. We shall just have time to go over there and be back in time for Bee."

They crossed the ferry, and drove to a house on Fifth avenue, and Muriel remained in the carriage while Bob went in with the parcel.

She did not pay much attention as to who or what Bob's friends were, the subject not interesting her especially. She was dreaming of Philip, wondering what would happen when Bob discovered how matters stood between them.

"Come in, Ella; old Mrs. Carton is here, as well as the sister, and they would both like so very much to make your acquaintance," and Bob, suiting action to his words, opened the cab door for Ella to get out.

She obeyed, almost mechanically, and followed him into the well-appointed house.

"My sister, Mrs. Philip Lazenby—Mrs. Wesley!"

As the two ladies looked at each other, it would have been difficult to say on which countenance was depicted the greater amount of horror-stricken astonishment!

CHAPTER X.

IN THE OLD HOUSE.

"Not only must Philip Lazenby be given to understand that his attentions are a gross insult to me, but he must be brought back to his wife's allegiance!"

And Mrs. Wesley walked rapidly up and down the room as she talked excitedly to her mother, about half an hour after Bob and Muriel had taken their departure.

"Easier said than done," observed the elder lady, whose belief in humanity generally, and conversion particularly, was of the smallest. "You may close your doors against this man, as, of course, you will if you have any pluck, but I don't see how you are to make him go back to his wife."

"I will, though; at all events, I'll have to try at it! Poor little thing, her brother told me she was very beautiful before she had the small-pox."

The mother's only answer was a grunt.

And Mrs. Wesley, taking no notice of it, fell to rusing. She was concocting a plot in her little not over-clever noddle, and she found the machinery of it no easy matter.

"I won't cut him altogether. I'll talk to him, reason with him," she muttered, half to herself. "Surely if I have as much influence over him as he is always telling me I have, I can use it for good quite as well as for evil."

"Nonsense, Julia!" exclaimed the mother. "You are deceiving yourself! I'll have no more of this man's philandering here! You'll just have the goodness to shut the door in his face! Your flirting propensities with single men are bad enough, but when it comes to married ones it is time it was stopped!"

"Mother, you'll make me very angry if you attempt to interfere with me! Have I not already told you I intend to bring about a thorough reconciliation and understanding between these two people?"

"Bah!"

The length of the "Bah!" and the argument generally was, however, at this moment, cut short by a very loud ring at the door-bell—such a ring as neither visitors nor servants are in the habit of giving.

Both the ladies rushed simultaneously to the window.

A horse had run away, and bringing the vehicle behind it in collision with a lamp-post, just outside Mrs. Wesley's door, the horse, conveyance, and occupants seemed to be lying in one mass on the pavement.

The door-bell had probably been rung by some officious member of the crowd, who thought that assistance must, sooner or later, be required.

Just as Mrs. Wesley looked out of the window, and uttered a little scream, the driver managed to disentangle himself from the debris.

He shook himself to make sure that none of his bones were broken, and then joined in the efforts one or two bystanders were making to separate the horse from the hack.

They cut the traces and other portions of the harness. Up went the shafts, and revealed to the view of the now amused watchers Philip Lazenby in such a position that, though he seemed to be lying back in a thoroughly comfortable and safe attitude, yet he was powerless to help himself, and was compelled to remain in that most ludicrous position till he was literally pulled out of the vehicle by two of the laughing crowd. Before the very house, too, in which Mrs. Wesley lived! It was a hard decree of fate, indeed it was!

He little guessed how much harder was the ordeal fate had yet in store for him.

He was not hurt, as Mrs. Wesley for a moment had feared; then she need have no mercy.

In a moment her mind was made up as to what she would do.

She went down the stairs just in time to meet Mr. Lazenby in the hall as he came in.

"Call up another carriage for Mr. Lazenby at once," she said to the butler.

Having thus got rid of this listening functionary, she turned to Philip.

"You had better drive straight to Brooklyn," she went on. "If Mrs. Lazenby hears of your accident she may be alarmed. Besides, she is a better nurse than I am, and you may not have escaped as scot-free as you imagine! Dear, dear, it was funny to see you in that cab!—more ridiculous than anything I ever witnessed before! Good-by!"

And without waiting for any answer from him, she ran up the stairs, leaving him muttering to himself:

"Wife? Brooklyn? Then she knows all about it! But the ridicule? Ah, ridicule always kills love!"

He did not attempt to follow her, but meekly getting into the cab that had been called for him he drove off; though whether he went to Brooklyn or not, Mrs. Wesley had not the gratification of knowing.

Two or three days passed, and nothing was heard of him. Mrs. Wesley had begun to think she had repressed him altogether; and if she was to bring about a reconciliation with his wife, this was not exactly what she desired.

She was thinking of writing a note, and asking Bob Faber to dinner, when that distinguished young officer put in a somewhat unexpected appearance.

On the day he called on Mrs. Wesley with his sister, Bob had gathered quite enough from the behavior of the two women to be quite aware that they had some unpleasant knowledge of each other; and also that the individual who had in some way occasioned this feeling was Philip.

It was in vain, however, that he cross-questioned his sister during their drive home.

She would not utter a word against her husband; and Bee, who was waiting for them when they arrived, could not help him.

She had suspected all was not right with Mr. and Mrs. Lazenby; but she did not actually know as much as Bob did himself.

It was left him, then, to ferret out particulars as best he could, and this he proceeded to do by keeping a very keen watch on Lazenby and his actions.

What he discovered can, perhaps, best be told by giving some account of his interview with Mrs. Wesley.

"Lazenby is very ill," was his abrupt announcement as soon as he had shaken hands; and he looked keenly into the lady's face to see what effect these words would have on her.

"I am sorry," she answered, very coolly. "And your sister, Mrs. Lazenby—how is she?"

"In utter despair and fear lest he should die. Will you come to them?"

"I, Mr. Faber? Why should I come?"

"Because in the sick man's ravings he asks for you ceaselessly, and the doctors seem to say that his only chance of life is in your presence."

Mrs. Wesley thought for a second or so, then

she said, briskly, "I will get my bonnet at once, and accompany you."

As they drove along, she inquired into the meaning of her being sent for in this summary fashion, and asked the nature of Philip Lazenby's illness.

It seemed that he had been more shaken by the accident than had at first been supposed, and, added to his shaking, there was a large share of annoyance at the ridicule attending the episode, the two combined bringing on so severe a cerebral attack that his life was in danger.

Arrived at the Brooklyn home, Mrs. Wesley found Muriel somewhat impatiently waiting for her, and from the heightened color in her cheeks there was evidently considerable fever mixed with her impatience. She did not love Mrs. Wesley any the better because she had judged it expedient to send for her now.

The first sentence however, that the little woman uttered had the effect of reassuring Muriel.

"Let us be true to each other," she said, holding out her hand to her. "If I am here to try and save your husband, it is in a great measure because I am anxious to save you from unhappiness."

And so, the way being led by Muriel herself, she went into Philip's sick-room, where Clarkson, who was in attendance, received her with something like an angry scowl.

She was, perhaps, the most difficult to convince of them all; yet ere long even she was mollified by the tone which Mrs. Wesley took, and it was evident to Clarkson that this stranger had not come to bring storm, but peace, into the household.

Philip knew Mrs. Wesley at once, though he had not seemed to recognize any of those who had been about him hitherto; but, though he had called for her in his ravings, he turned from her with a sort of shudder when she did appear.

It was as though loyalty was seeking to conquer faithlessness in his distorted mind.

As the power of memory and the knowledge of past events came slowly back to his brain, he could not comprehend why Mrs. Wesley was so frequently standing there by Ella's side.

"She was a friend of Mr. Bob's," Clarkson told him; but that did not enlighten him.

"Why was Bob's friend there?"

The mystery was explained to him one afternoon, when well enough to have his chair wheeled into an adjoining room.

Muriel, by arrangement, left him alone for half an hour with Mrs. Wesley, in whom she had learnt to have the greatest confidence.

What passed during that interview no one knew; but Mrs. Wesley left the house soon afterward, and the following day started with her mother on a foreign tour.

Philip, meanwhile, was very silent; but as he struggled back to health it was evident to those about him that he was a chastened, as well as an honest and graver man.

Six years have passed since these events happened. One of the elder partners of the house of Burlington, Frost & Company has gone to his rest, and Philip has taken his place.

The little house in Brooklyn has long since been given up and replaced by the much more commodious one in New York, which became Bob's at Colonel Faber's death, and was now rented by Philip.

There are many lights in its windows now, and much running to and fro may be observed, Clarkson, among all the servants, being the most active. She is here, there, and everywhere, looking after everybody.

It is evident that it is the occasion of a great festival, for Muriel, in a dress of pale amber satin, trimmed with soft lace, as Clarkson only can trim, comes down the staircase, and walks, an approving expression on her face, through the rooms.

A ball is about to take place in honor of Mrs.

Wesley's marriage with a distinguished foreign diplomat.

Muriel, as she stands there waiting for the guests to arrive, though no longer the beautiful girl who turned men's heads and made their hearts flutter in that same old house nearly ten years ago, is, nevertheless, a very pleasing-looking little matron.

Happiness has set its beautifying imprint on her brow, and time has considerably worn out the marks left by the dreadful illness.

As she pauses before the mantle-piece to give a few last touches to the lovely flowers which are arranged there in beds of moss, Philip comes in, and going up to his wife, puts his arm round her.

"My darling, you cannot form any idea how thoroughly happy I am to-night!"

"Yes, dearest Philip, I know full well; for your happiness or misery always finds a true echo in my own heart."

The first guests that arrive are the Claytons; and honest Joe's whole countenance beams with delight as they unexpectedly witness this *entente cordiale* between husband and wife, for he feels sure now that Philip no longer regrets the marriage into which he felt at one time honor alone had driven him.

Bob and Bee, now married and settled a few streets off, speedily follow the Claytons, to be succeeded in their turn by Mrs. Faber, looking much plumper and rosier than she did six years ago, for she is now living in a perfect monotony of content.

Of course Madame la Baronne de Torres Vedras, as Mrs. Wesley is now called, is received with due honor and much *empressement*, and the whole party seems likely to prove a very festive one, especially as the dancing arrangements have been placed in the hands of Frank Danvers, the only unmarried man among the intimates.

For some days past he has been very busy collecting the necessary presents for a German, which he is to lead with a very pretty Miss Fuller, a niece of the baroness, and, as Joe Clayton observes, "There is no knowing what may be the result of the ball in the Lazenby mansion."

THE END.

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